DEATH, DISINTEGRATION OF THE BODY AND SUBJECTIVITY

IN

THE CONTEMPORARY HORROR FILM

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SUMMARY

This thesis is an attempt to account for the contemporary American horror film's increased reliance upon images of bodily dismemberment and decay.At the core of this exploration is an inspection of the body's capability as a metaphor by which our understanding of the relation of self to society is articulated.The horror film is shown to be a genre traditionally disposed towards the interrogation of categories of human identity,and one which is now responding to the kind of cultural developments often referred to by the expression postmodernism.As such the genre is placed in a context of other social discourses about the body,death,disease and decay.In pro--posing the body as the central metaphor of the modern horror film, and pursuing its significance in a range of recent film texts,the thesis triesto provide a positive basis for understanding an aspect of popular culture often left 'explained' by accusations of exploitation or dismissed by the traditionalists as aberrant.

The thesis does not attempt to be a theory of genre per se,nor does it offer an exhaustive account of the field;the outlining of the emergence of a new tendency is not meant to imply that more conventional material has been discontinued.'Body Horror' is argued to be the most important development in the field however,and the work concludes after demonstrating its vitality in recent examples where its deployment takes radically varied positions with respect to the construction of the masculine subject in particular.

The work is broken down into five Chapters.In Chapter One the existing theoretical literature is critically examined.In Chapter Two,the nature of the contemporary horror film is laid out.In Chapter Three the body as a symbo is considered in relation to the genre.in Chapter Four this idea is developed through textual analysis in relation to discourses of death and disease.In Chapet Five the emergence of a postmodern horror film is considered.A con--clusion acts a s a summary and as a focus in which the implication of the work for feminist and psychoanalytical theories of the subject can be drawn.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I should like to offer thanks to the following for the range of assistance and support I have received over the period of this thesis' development: Richard Dyer, my academic supervisor, whose encouragement and shared interest in the field has always provided me with reasons for continuing when the task seemed without end, and whose advice and sensitivity to a difficult topic was a model of rigor and common sense; any failings in what follows cannot be other than my own, and any strengths are in his debt; Sarah Booth, my partner, who has had to endure the inconveniences that inevitably arisé, and whose support was complete and immeasurable; the department of Film Studies at the University of Warwick, where teaching posts allowed me to develop my interests, and especially I would like to thank Susan Dufft for her many kindnesses over the years. Finally, this work would not have been possible without the hospitality of Margaret Fasken, and so I dedicate it to her and to Sarah, her grand-daughter.

DECLARATION

Some aspects of this thesis have appeared - during the course of its writing - in condensed and generalized form as an article, Vile Bodies and Bad Medicine, written by the author and published in the 'Body Horror' issue of Screen Vol. 27, No. 1, January/ February 1986. It is a short essay and contains some of the more general assumptions and observations which are here developed at length in the hospital and medical horror components of Chapter Four.

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INTRODUCTION

In the Summer of 1983, as this thesis was still in its first stirrings as an M.A. project looking for direction, the Daily Mail orchestrated its famous campaign centred on an attempt (eventually successful) to ban the emergent folk devil of the 'video nasty'. There is a book still waiting to be written on the subject itself, but this thesis developed out of an initial examination of both the hysterical rhetoric of the popular press (and, regrettably some critics who should have known better), and a number of the so-called 'nasties'. It was apparent early on that these films did not constitute a body of work through any real historical or aesthetic continuity, but were merely categorized by the dubious virtue of their inclusion on the Director of Public Prosecution's list of films that might be prosecuted under the Obscene Publications Act. The list (a copy of which is included at the end of this section, with films seen by the author underlined) soon revealed itself to be constituted by only one true intrinsic factor - the inclusion of graphic scenes of gore and physical assault. Given that the conspiracy theories of it, as part of a new wave of obscenity aimed at children, are deflated by the realization that many of the films were made years ago (Blood Feast was made in 1963 by Herschell Lewis), then what emerged most clearly from the chaotic debate were, for me, three related areas of interest;

i) The intention to censor the newly arrived video market that eventually resulted in the passage of the Video Recordings Bill.

ii) The exploitation of popular fears about powerlessness in the face of expanding high technology.

iii) The registration of these concerns over a range of texts united by their inclusion of graphic images of bodily destruction.

The first area used the second to achieve its purpose and is now largely silent in the wake of its success. The second two, however, appeared to be related phenomena, the significance of which is still with us, and which is not by any means exhausted by the investigation of these, mainly tedious and badly made, films. Discussion of the films usually manifested itself by reference to the 'effects debate' - what they must be doing - and therefore failed in any way to explore what they might mean. This sense that the films themselves were acting upon helpless victim/viewers, consistently appeared as part of a rhetoric that expressed anxiety over new technology. In an exemplary piece in The Mail on Sunday, Richard Neighbour recounted his desperation and lost parental authority when his son managed to view Alien at another friend's house after being forbidden to do so at home: 'I had lost, beaten by technology', and then, in an article spangled with fears of high-tech destroying the traditional power structures of the family, he asks us: 'What's to stop some entrepreneur from setting up a TV station anywhere in the world and beaming an endless stream of Driller Killer and Deep Throats into our homes?'[1]

If this sense of helplessness in the face of technology and its threat to tradition is not entirely new - its basic format is present in the myths of Eden and Prometheus/Pandora in the form of knowledge-as-threat - then its crystallization around the image of the destroyed body, rather than the lost soul, is. It is this configuration of images and ideas which I set out to examine, extending the analysis and findings to the modern American horror film which has remained consistently aware of their potential and, despite an accumulating self-consciousness, is only now revealing their full range of signifying possibilities in works like The Fly.

The reasons for the horror film's present fascination with the physically horrific are too easily dismissed by the idea that palates are simply jaded by exposure to coarser and coarser material. The body - however entrenched are our responses to its actual violation and contents - is capable of signifying in as rich and complex a manner as any other common symbol, perhaps more so due to its ubiquitousness. In the words of Theodor Adorno, 'A consciousness that wishes to withstand the unspeakable finds itself again and again thrown back on the attempt to understand, if it is not to succomb subjectively to the madness that prevails objectively.'[2] What follows is an effort to confront the unspeakable of the contemporary American horror film on its own terms, trying to understand its nature rather than condemning its unpleasing aspects and failure to conform to our prior categorizations.

In an approach that wishes to avoid being simply another theory of genre, which uses a Platonizing fixation of form and function, I

have had to depart considerably from some of the more conservative critical writings. It has been necessary, therefore, to place the findings of this research in an overview of the critical literature which constitutes Chapter One. Perhaps one of the most important aspects of this is the establishing of the genre's obsession with interrogating the categories of identity, and this provides an obvious point of continuity with this thesis. This also takes into account the tradition of psychoanalytical writings on horror and the importance of the figure of the 'other' in works ranging from those of Kracauer to the present developments in the field. I have sought to qualify this notion by establishing the changing nature of the horror film's construction of the other, and its importance for our understanding of the subject. The Chapters that follow show a shift in the construction of this relation and representation of self/other and the reason for the body's gradual foregrounding in this process as a point of assault and image of lost control. Co-extensive with this is a qualification of the use of psychoanalytical approaches; this thesis finds the psychoanalytic discourse valuable, but not totally explanatory of the horror film's significance and changing character. It is part, itself, of wider cultural discourses that affect the horror film, and within which we understand its imagery. Consequently the Conclusion acknowledges the fact that the change in the horror film's construction of the subject coincides with a reappraisal of the psychoanalytic subject in a similar and suggestive manner.

After the critical overview, Chapter Two makes preliminary points about the popular, rather than classical understanding of genre as a

prelude to the definition of the horror film today. After the characteristics of what appears to be a distinctively new emphasis in the genre, the Chapter considers the importance of the gore or 'splatter' movie. The central importance of this aspect of the films is developed in relation to the fascination - evidenced in fan magazines such as Fangoria - with the use of special effects. This provides some understanding of the wider reading context in which these films need to be understood, rather than making assumptions based upon the properties of earlier texts alone, and prompts the examination of the body's significance in the following Chapter.

Chapter Three offers an exploration of the significance of the body for the cinema in general. It has been one of the problems restricting a full appreciation of the horror genre, that the body has often been understood as, more often than not, the sign of sexuality or its more disturbing implications. The enhanced interest in questions of sexuality prompted by the feminist re-evaluation of popular cinema has exacerbated this dilemma. This is the source of a contradiction of interests where the politically progressive potential of the genre appears to be compromised by the repulsive qualities often associated with the monster. This is considered by Robin Wood to be the 'genre's unresolved quandary', based on the premise that, 'if one accepts that the "monster" of the horror film is the embodiment of all that our culture represses, and that (as a direct consequence of this) the monster of almost every "progressive" horror film is necessarily the most sympathetic character, isn't any attempt to find a positive resolution to the conflicts doomed to failure by the inescapable connotations of evil inherent in the

genre's basic premises?'[3] What I have tried to do is to open up the wider range of possible meanings that the body has for us, by starting with its importance for general constructions of the subject in the cinema. In particular, it can be understood as part of the way in which subject coherence is formed. Following this, the works of the anthropologist Mary Douglas are drawn upon to offer general propositions about the potential of the body as a social symbol. Douglas's work is largely established by reference to primitive cultures, establishing the image of the body in ritual as a symbolic analogue of social rules and taboos; especially it is an indicator of social order and disorder when represented as intact or in disarray. The adherence to this relationship in some instances of popular fiction are then given. What emerges is a portrait of the fictional subject as inextricably tied to the idea of its relation to the world it inhabits. A suggestive example of this interrelationship is then offered in Frederick Jameson's attempt to define the mechanism by which the subject of romance fiction is constructed, the horror genre being significantly a part of this tradition.

In Chapter Four the body is shown to be a symbol capable of registering existential fears about our historical condition of existence. By using works by the historian Philipe Ariès, and by Susan Sontag, the body is shown as specially important to our contemporary anxieties about death, and the disease image of cancer is considered as a secular monster. This is conducted by an analysis of the sustained use of these ideas in the works of David Cronenberg. In the second part of the Chapter, the body, as the registering point of fears of contemporary powerlessness, is

developed by an analysis of the film Coma. As well as placing the body in relation to conspiracist discourses constructed around fears of high-technology and the institutional aspect of medicalization, Coma illustrates the problematic nature of this discourse for the film's attempt to produce a positive image of the female protagonist. This is extended with analyses of The Shining and Poltergeist to highlight the specific assault upon the viewing subject's involvement with the text.

In Chapter Five a general proposition about the changing nature of the horror film's construction of the subject is made; the subject of the past - unified and coherent - is tending to give way to a fragmented and decentred self. The shift from the clear demarcations of self/other to one of confusion and blurring is exemplified by a comparative analysis of the two versions of The Thing. This is conducted by showing the change in subjectivity to be one commensurate with an altered view of our relation to contemporary society. This, in turn, is related to characterizations of contemporary culture within the terms of an emergent postmodernism. Following this, the horror film is shown to be achieving quite different potentials with varied responses to the situation. In considering The Fly, the loss of prior categories of the self is uncompromised by attempts to restore an earlier state of things. Whereas both The Terminator and RoboCop develop different responses to the disturbing face of new technology. Both films place this technology in relation to questions of masculinity, and in The Terminator this forms the basis of a critical attack. My final consideration of RoboCop, however, indicates the way that this threat of technology - directed at the body of the subject - is able to be recuperated in terms of the

assertion of traditional constructions of masculine identity.

Finally, in the Conclusion, a summary of the main achievements of the thesis is accompanied by some comments upon areas which - too substantial to be dealt with in depth here - are immediately open to reconsideration, the most important being questions about femininity and the Lacanian theory of the subject.

PARLIAMENTARY GROUP VIDEO ENQUIRY

Chairman: Lord Nugent of Guildford, House of Lords, London SW1A 0AA

CONFIDENTIAL

September 1983

The following is a list of Video Films currently the subject of legal proceedings or being considered for prosecution by the Director of Public Prosecutions under the Obscenity laws.

Absurd

Blood Feast

Bloody Man

Bogie Man

Cannibal Apocalypse

Cannibal Ferox

Cannibal Holocaust

Cannibal Man

Cannibal Terror

Contamination

Death Trap

Don't go in the House

Don't go in the Woods Alone

Driller Killer

Faces of Death

House on the Edge of the Park

I spit on your Grave

Mardi Gras Massacre

Night of the Demon

Nightmares in a Damaged Brain

Possession

Pranks

Snuff

S S Experiment Camp

The Beast in Heat

The Burning

The last House on the Left

The Living Dead

The Slayer

Zombie Flesh Eaters

Zombie Creeping Flesh

Zombie Terror

Research base and all correspondence to:
Television Research Unit
Lady Spencer Churchill College, Oxford OX9 1HX
Telephone: 08677 4850

'Perhaps if one were to cut out a heart, a lobe of the liver, a single convolution of the brain, and put it to a page, it would speak with more eloquence than all the words of Balzac. Such a piece would need no literary style.'

- Richard Selzer, Confessions of a Knife

INCOMPOSITO CORPORIS INAEQUALITATEM INDICAT MENTIS.

REFERENCES: INTRODUCTION

[1] Richard Neighbour, The Mail on Sunday. September 5th, 1983, p.4.

[2] Theodor Adorno, Minima Moralia, London, Verso, 1984, p.103.

[3] Robin Wood, Neglected Nightmares: In Defence of a Subversive Genre and its Four Undersung Auteurs: Craven, Rothman, Clark and Romero, in Film Comment, March/April 1980, p.30.

CHAPTER ONE

A REVIEW OF CRITICAL APPROACHES TO THE HORROR FILM

In a recent reappraisal of horror film critical literature Christine Gledhill acknowledged the enduring failure to develop a generally acceptable definition or theory of the genre:

> 'Historical approaches demonstrate a heterogeneity of inputs and developments rather than the integrated evolution of generic tradition attributed to the western or gangster film - e.g. Universal's gothic horror films of the 30's; German Expressionism; 50's science fiction monster movies; Hammer horror in the UK; Corman's Poe cycle; the onset of the psychological thriller with Psycho (1960)...'[1]

Critical attempts to provide an all-embracing account of the genre as a constant and continuous aesthetic tradition have tended to remain helpful to the extent to which they are able to be broadly inclusive in their basic assumptions since, in a genre - if we may retain the term for matters of convenience here - which is generally accepted as inclusive of such works as King Kong (1933), The Student of Prague (1913), Invasion of the Body Snatchers (1956), The Man with the X-Ray Eyes (1963) and Videodrome (1982),[x] there

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[x] All of these examples except Videodrome are to be found in Horror Movies by Carlos Clarens as part of the horror genre.

are inevitably going to be major limitations in employing much of the established critical apparatus routinely used in the study of film genres.

Gledhill correctly identifies two basic currents as emerging from the late-developing fund of serious contributions:

> '[A] broad distinction emerges between those seeking predominantly psycho-sociological explanations of the genre - what it represents for its audiences - and those attempting to analyse the aesthetic effects offered to the audience by the play of the genre's conventions.'[2 x]

The Horror Tradition

The first major contribution to the field in fact straddles both positions. Siegfried Kracauer's From Caligari to Hitler[3] is a landmark both in its elaboration of the iconographical and narrative consistencies of the cinema of Weimar Germany and in being the first major attempt to provide a sociology of film in its efforts to explain the historically contemporary significance of those aesthetic features. Although the work, which appeared in 1947, is not an attempt to provide a theory of a horror genre beyond the period under examination, it remained the only serious attempt, for some years, to come to terms with the cultural richness of these popular trends of a cinema that includes the influential The Golem (Stellan Rye : 1913), The Cabinet of Dr Caligari (Robert Wiene : 1919), Nosferatu (F.W. Murnau : 1922) and Metropolis (Fritz Lang : 1926). I

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[x] I should say here that the two tendencies are identifiable but actually inseparable. Rather, it is a matter of emphasis.

shall return to Kracauer later as he develops a number of points of importance for this thesis of a more general nature.

With the exception of Michel Laclos' Le Fantastique au Cinéma[4] which, in a characteristically French tradition, tends to include horror and science fiction within the purview of 'le fantastique', there is little beyond the occasional article until the appearance of Carlos Clarens' Horror Movies : An Illustrated Survey and Ivan Butler's The Horror Film, both published in 1967.[5] Both works seek to outline the presence of a continuous body of work which forms an identifiable tradition reaching back to the work of Méliès. Each tries to create this sense of continuity by the focusing of interest upon major works, periods, directors and actors which have been crucial in establishing conventional icons, themes and styles in the genre; but the selectivity involved in maintaining this sense of influence and determination is considerable. Here, for example, is a list of Butler's chapter headings which may serve as a fairly accurate indication:

HORROR THROUGH THE AGES

THE MACABRE IN THE SILENT CINEMA

DRACULA AND FRANKENSTEIN

THREE EARLY SOUND HORROR CLASSICS

BRITISH HORROR

CLOUZOT : LE COURBEAU AND LES DIABOLIQUES

HITCHCOCK AND PSYCHO

ROGER CORMAN AND EDGAR ALLEN POE

POLANSKI AND REPULSION

Clarens' work is more substantial in its detail and inclusiveness, but

remains unconvincing in its ability to provide the basis of a continuous aesthetic process. More rigorous is S.S. Prawer's Caligari's Children[6] which establishes the genre around a body of conventions which comprise a 'distinctive film rhetoric of the macabre'. While Prawer is more sophisticated and up-to-date in the range of critical and theoretical apparatus he brings to bear, and more thorough in his attention to developing contributions in sound and use of colour for example, his insistence upon films such as The Cabinet of Dr Caligari as a kind of master text with an enduring influence:

> '[It] presents a veritable anthology of figures themes and images which later directors have re-used, varied expanded, and developed further, without even now exhausting their possibilities...'[7]

is unaccompanied by any account of how (outside of a kind of taken-for-granted auteurism) this process might take place. Although 13 years later in its arrival, there is a similar kind of thrust, here, to Clarens' claim that

> 'Conscious or not, the influence of The Phantom of the Opera has been felt in most horror efforts since.'[8]

Perhaps an awareness of the difficulty of making such sweeping claims stick for the entire genre, it is notable that a number of recent works have restricted themselves to more modest attempts at definition. For instance Charles Derry's acknowledgement of the radically changed face of the genre since the 1960's is reflected in his breakdown of horror production since then into three distinct categories: 1) Horror of Personality, 2) The Horror of Armageddon,

3) The Horror of the Demonic.[9] Other projects include the narrowed-down focus upon single and readily-identifiable sub-genres of a long-standing or emergent nature such as Alain Silver and James Ursini's The Vampire Film[10] or Gregory Waller's treatment of vampires and zombies in The Living and the Undead.[11]

The Horror of the Text

The other major component of the foregoing overviews of Clarens et al. is the presence of certain, relatively untheorized, assertions about the horror genre's capacity to exercise a particular kind of effect upon or feeling in the spectator. Broadly speaking this tends to involve the insistence upon a kind of textual manipulation whereby the audience is teased by the playing upon their own sense of anticipation or imagination; the explicit is promised, or implied but true horror is achieved generally by its being withheld or obscured. In Butler's terms 'the unseen is more frightening than the seen' and this is a major aspect of the genre's defining 'power to shock or terrify'. In other words, the genre is defined by an affective stance in regard to its audience in which there is a priority of style over iconographical or thematic material. One may identify a kind of conservative strand in these works where there is a traditional reluctance fully to confront the appalling images and events which make up the typical horror story, and which frequently leads to the use of words such as Macabre (Butler) or 'terror film' (Prawer). The indulgence and unabashed celebration of grisly material presents itself mostly as a problem in such studies and exceptions are made only in the case of possible masterpieces. This weakness in being able to confront an increasingly popular

tendency in the horror film is often left explained by common-sense appeals to the idea of a jaded public taste; one finds an appeal to the sense of the average or moderate in Butler's remark that:

> 'When a spectator of normal sensibility revolts it is invariably because the film seems to be indulging in beastliness for its own sake, to be enjoying cruelty.'[12]

The idea of such straightforward approaches to gore is usually given pejorative treatment. Dealing with the horrific in literature in 1945, H.P. Lovecraft distinguished between the genuinely super-natural and 'the literature of mere physical fear and the mundanely gruesome'.[13] Clarens, more interestingly offers a relationship between the artistic values of the film and any unpleasantness it may be dealing with:

> 'The reassurance of irreality that will remove the sting of fear is provided in adult experience by art, artifice or mere craftsmanship. We require these to frame the terrorific, the violent or the tragic; otherwise, they will spill over into the disgusting, the ridiculous or the bathetic.'[14]

The idea of restraint, a longstanding feature of critical practice, occurs again and again in writings on the horror film, and manifests itself either as a simple response to the unpleasant to look upon or as a more positively conceived tenet for the production of art in general, or horrific art in particular. The former tendency is the least productive since its attitude to horrific images and events is most often the result of a refusal to <u>positively</u> examine their significance for the culture in which they

have arisen. There persists, rather, the reassuring assumption that their meaning, unlike other, less disturbing or taboo aspects of popular culture, is self-evident or transparent; of course we are all going to die and are thus afraid of death and ageing; images of dismemberment and bodily damage are present solely to testify to the fact that they are in reality unpleasant and un-attractive experiences. In other words, there is something inherently ugly about these phenomena and which determines the limits of their cultural significance. Whereas this kind of property cannot exclude their capability for conveying other kinds of meanings which are constructed within a wider frame of reference. It is one of the central claims of this thesis that this area, especially in the light of the contemporary emphasis upon just this kind of imagery in the horror film, requires a more positive approach and following chapters will attempt to provide a theoretical and analytical groundwork for it.

Recently, there have been a number of more complex accounts of the horror genre as one which specifically plays upon the viewer's sense of what may or may not be seen, drawing in their different ways on the accumulating body of theoretical work that has been developing in the last twenty years of film studies; crucially in the fields of psychoanalysis and semiotics. At the core of this work, as it has been applied to the cinematic processes that make up the typical features of mainstream narrative cinema, is an influential progression of writings that seek to explain many of these aspects in terms of general strategies of pleasure production. That, according to Christian Metz, Stephen Heath and Laura Mulvey - to name some of the most influential - mainstream cinema has evolved as a body of

representational and narrational codes, the overbearing concern of which is to confirm the sense of the viewer's unified and secure subjectivity; this being guaranteed by the complex orchestration of point-of-view and spectacle so as to provide the spectator simultaneously with a privileged and coherent access to the film's events and a kind of safe, voyeuristic detachment.[15] Following this, it has been argued that mainstream narrative is a semiotic system tailored to avoiding the production of feelings of an unpleasant or potentially disturbing nature engendered by the constant narrative demands of a shifting spectator position.[16]

But, it is now arguable that, in the light of the horror genre's particular need to produce, in part at least, feelings of anxiety or unease as a major component of their popular appeal, it is exactly these kinds of strategy which may be a source of that unease and that it is possible to identify certain typical features of a horrific, cinematic narrational style. J.P. Telotte, for example, sees a kind of interplay in the horror film between the disturbing experience of the spectator's involvement and the reassurance provided by the genre's characteristic reflexivity; audiences are reassured by the highly conventionalized aspects of what they are experiencing, by their familiarity with the genre:

> 'Clearly, the horror film - perhaps more than any other genre - is designed to evoke a specific response from its audience, whether it be a shiver of fear, a vague uneasiness, or a sense of relief at the dispelling of some great threat. The manner in which the viewer is drawn into the film narrative therefore becomes a key to properly understanding any example of the genre. And when

> viewed in this light, every horror film becomes something of a reflexive text, referring back not only to its own generic workings, but also to its audience which, through its visual participation in the events unfolded, contributes to their impact and affirms man's capacity to bear with such traumatic encounters.
> That almost personal confrontation between the generic formula and the audience is at the heart of most horror films.'[17]

The importance of absolute familiarity with the genre's conventions has been noted elsewhere by Waller who argues that the narratives themselves frequently involve a testing of the characters in terms of their capacity to adapt to, or be aware of, these elements, e.g. the relevance of vampire mythology concerning day and night, garlic, crosses etc. or of the necessity of decapitating zombies to prevent a return:

> 'The relationship between repetition and variation, convention and innovation, that underlies the working of all popular genres is, in stories of the living and the undead, a matter of life and death for the characters and a topic of direct, explicit interest for the informed reader/viewer.'[18]

There exists then this balance between the desire for disturbance in the viewer security and its possible return through the ritualistic invocation of highly conventionalized material. Two other writers continue this theory with greater emphasis upon the psychoanalytical/semiotic method. Ed Lowry places these sources of

disquiet within overall textual strategies of restored spectator reassurance:

> '[I]t seems that one of the most characteristic enunciative strategies of the horror film involves the wholesale, if only temporary, disruption of the viewer's position of coherence. Witness the shock techniques of the horror film: the shock cut, the unexpected aural punctuation by a scream or a burst of music, the instantaneous materialization of horror in an otherwise classically coherent scene.'[19]

The horror genre is crucially reliant upon, but far from dominated by, strategies of classical cinematic enunciation and narration:

> 'The classicism of most horror films requires a quick restoration of coherence to both the enunciation and the narrative; but it is precisely the disruption of that coherence which the horror film markets in its promise of sensationalism. Indeed, to the extent that the classical film narrative centres the ego of the viewer as a source of meaning and coherence, the horror film is that genre of classical narrative which promises spectators the occasional sensation of temporary insanity.'[20]

It is this kind of approach, which sees the horror film's peculiarity in its construction of subjectivity, that has led to the reappraisal of the genre's Gothic associations and origins as part of a more general re-examination of that tradition.

The Gothic Approach

Until recently the Gothic tradition in literature had remained largely ignored by serious writers and commentators, being regarded in the main as a disreputable and eccentric offshoot of the romantic movement. Attempts at providing descriptions and definitions of the Gothic usually rested on iconographical, thematic, narrative and atmospheric details. The literary origin of the tradition is usually cited as Horace Walpole's The Castle of Otranto, published in 1764, initiating a considerable body of imitations and developments throughout the rest of the eighteenth century and into the next. (For a comprehensive account of the tradition see David Punter: The Literature of Terror : London : 1980). Pervaded by a concern with the supernatural and the morbid, the genre is immediately recognizable from its recurrent details of place and setting and with marvellous imagery:

> '[T]here is the medieval setting with its castle and tyrant lord, the chivalrous hero whose identity is not revealed until the end of the story, the persecuted maiden, the subterranean vaults with secret passages and trap-doors, the loquacious servant, caves deep into the woods, the monastery, and many momentos from the supernatural worlds: a bleeding statue, a helmet falling out of the sky, a portrait that comes alive.'
> (M. Myoshi : The Divided Self : 1969 : New York University Press, p.10.)

Correspondingly, there persists a tone, or 'Gothic spirit' as Myoshi refers to it, of 'melancholy, wonder, suspense, terror...' and which locates the reader within a universe of helplessness and

despair, a world where the desire or ability to take action is dissipated and overwhelmed in an outer domain of twisted settings which suggest inner, spiritual confusion and decay.

It is these features which have dominated popular understandings of the genre and its offshoots; in particular it has been tempting to straightforwardly locate cinematic instances of horror which display certain of them as a continuation of the tradition. The Universal cycle of the thirties which drew heavily upon Frankenstein (Mary Shelley:1818) and Dracula (Bram Stoker:1897) repeatedly created a world of European medievalism in which the same characters or character types re-enacted the same fundamental dramas amid cobwebbed castles and haunted landscapes. The cinema especially, in its capacity as a visual medium has attracted theories of genre which rely heavily upon iconographical considerations. (See,for instance, Buscombe, MacArthur, Kitses and Sobchack).[21] Consequently, there has been something of a tendency to evaluate and categorize the historical development of the horror film by observing individual films' or cycles' adherence to and modification of such generic conventions, frequently, as in the case of Prawer citing the great works of the German Expressionist period as the instigators of an horrific or 'macabre' visual style which might be seen as the cinematic achievement of the Gothic tradition.[22] Evaluation may then ensue, as in the case of Prawer's defence of The Cabinet of Dr Caligari, Vampyr and Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde which forms the body of his book, when particular texts are deemed to have best realized the potential of the tradition's conventions. Although, Prawer (a German Language scholar) draws his lines of continuity through the

German literature of terror into wider considerations of the horror film, there are ways in which his work shares fundamental assumptions with most contemporary writing upon the Gothic legacy. This is in its insistence upon the genre's existence as a response to contemporary notions of subjectivity; that is, the Gothic construction of the subject appears consistently to articulate a perceived shift in Western notions of the self. Theme, characterization, image and structure all consistently develop the impression and effect of a 'divided self', a subjectivity split between apparently separate value systems or moral universes, yet constructed within the play of a kind of textual ambivalence and inconclusiveness which remains hesitant and unable to re-establish a convincingly stable or unified sense of the self. The world of the Gothic is haunted by the imagery of the mirror and the shadow as they contribute to the perpetual suggestion of the alter ego or split personality theme which, developing in momentum throughout the literature, is exemplified in Frankenstein's vision of the hideous counterpart constructed from dead matter, and in The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde (Robert Louis Stevenson:1886), in which the composed Dr Jekyll literally transforms himself into a monster representing his worst instincts and whose moral corruption evidences itself in Hyde's physical ugliness. Despite numerous variations of the doubling effect within the texts of the Gothic, it is generally agreed that they are reducible to a shared concern with creating the sense of a divided subjectivity:

> 'Distinctions among the several themes of self-duplication and self-division arise from the source of the second self or partial self. In the case of

> duplication, the second self or double appears, as it were, from outside the first self; wheras in the case of division, as in the Jekyll-Hyde personality, it splits off from within. For our practical purposes here this difference is of only minor importance next to what is essential to both, the disintegration of the person.' (Myoshi, pp.xi,xii)

Moreover, the confusion of, or breakdown of,identity is reinforced by the frequent uncertainties of feeling and understanding in the characters, by the persistence of doubt both moral and epistemological. It is considerations of this nature that have led to the inclusion of the Gothic within the overall definitions of the literary Fantastic as it has been characterized by the theorist Tzvetan Todorov in The Fantastic : A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre (London:1973). According to Rosemary Jackson, the Gothic uncertainty of the subject forms part of a general interrogation of the categories of the knowable in our society and in which the themes of the literature are transferred into textual uncertainties or 'hesitations' which extend to the reader's engagement with the text itself:

> 'That inscription of hesitation on the level of narrative structure, which Todorov identified as fantasy's defining feature, can be read as a displacement of fantasy's central thematic issue: an uncertainty as to the nature of the 'real', a problematization of categories of 'realism' and 'truth', of the 'seen' and 'known' (in a culture which declares 'seeing is believing'). Fantasy's ambiguous literary effects, on the level of form, enact its thematic uncertainties and

hesitations, through a sliding of thematic into structural equivocation.'[23]

The Todorovian formulation has found influence in studies of the horror film, being acknowledged by Jackson and by Prawer. By far the most strict application though, is Mark Nash's sustained analysis of Vampyr (Carl Dreyer:1932)[24] in which Nash proposes a case for the 'cinefantastic' as a genre defined by hesitational practices developed through the operation of shifting pronoun functions (the textual equivalent in the film of 'you', 'I' etc.). The analysis remains within the terms of a fairly rigid formalism, however, and it has been the task of others to develop the idea of textual ambiguity and hesitation in the horror film to locate its practices - as part of a materialist aesthetic - in terms of their broader cultural significance.

Generally, this has involved the development of a more rigorous and systematic theoretical and analytical approach to the longstanding and frequently common-sensical assumptions concerning the horror genre's capacity to represent and, perhaps, assuage comtemporary socio-psychological anxieties.

Socio-psychological Approaches

Unlike the common sense assumptions which underpin much of critical output on the popular cinema, the horror film does attract explanations, at both a sophisticated and naïve level, which draw upon the idea of their performing some kind of socio-psychological function; the most common being that they are

capable of dramatizing in a coherent manner those aspects of contemporary existence which we find most disturbing, and, by resolving them within the form of classical narrative, providing a cathartic or reassuring experience for the viewer. At the most basic level there follows a tendency to define the horror film as belonging to a genre which reveals our unease with the understanding of death, destructiveness/violence and sexuality which persist in our culture. Owing to the sheer insistence of these topics at a thematic level in the genre and their abiding presence as the kind of narrative image upon which the films are frequently advertised, then this might be conceded as incontestable up to a point. Yet all of these areas are to be found in the rest of the commercial cinema, often as the central narrative issue, and there are certainly a great many films produced in Hollywood today which are more obviously about sex and violence than are some of the most significant current examples of the horror genre. (For instance 9½ Weeks (Adrian Lyne:1986) and Full Metal Jacket (Stanley Kubrick:1987) in relation to The Thing (John Carpenter:1982) or The Fly (David Cronenberg:1986)). In fact, even when dealing with material of this nature, the horror film at its most popular and representative has been characterized by a lack of attention to realism (not to be confused with the frequently made claims of explicitness) and plausibility[x] displacing its events and their explanations into the terrain of the supernatural.

There are those who would interpret the horror film, or certain aspects of it, in terms of a fairly straightforward address to

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[x]Plausibility, that is, in terms of the presuppositions of western rationalism, not diegetic or generic consistency.

cultural phenomena which we are more or less consciously aware of and subject to. There are often accounts of particular cycles of films which use a kind of 'reflection' approach to the period in question, whereby the traumatic developments of a certain period of social history somehow are made manifest in the horror film. The two most common examples of this might be the explanation of 'fifties Sci-Fi/ Horror in terms of the 'Bomb' and the 'Cold War' via their obsession with mutation and alien invasion (see Charles Derry:Dark Dreams or Peter Biskind:Seeing is Believing), or of the 'seventies renaissance of the American 'family' horror film which is commonly explained by reference to sexual politics, Watergate and the war in Vietnam (see, for instance, Harlan Kennedy:Things that go Howl in the ID, much of the writing in Robin Wood et al. The American Nightmare and Bertrand Philbert:Le Syndrome Black et Decker).[26] On the other hand, there are claims in which the genre, or specific instances of it, manages to resolve for us perennial and inevitable existential fears, as in R.W.H. Dillard's proposal that the function of the horror film is '[T]o make us accept death as the natural ending of life.'[27] and that George A. Romero's Night of the Living Dead for example, displays a literal 'fear of the dead and particularly of the known dead of dead kindred.'[28]

By far the most persuasive and theoretically consistent accounts of the genre, however, are those which have taken their points of departure from psycho-analysis. The long tradition of psycho-analytical approaches to the genre, which are fundamentally premised upon the existence of unconsciously-determined patterns of signification, is one which suggests explanations for a number of the

horror films' recurrent features; the displacement of disturbing material into systems of surreal or supernatural logic is common to both the horror genre and to the experience of the dream or nightmare which, it is arguable, may afford the basis for assuming a parallel interpretive procedure.

The first wave of horror films of any great consistency - those of the Weimar period in German history - provoked a response from Siegfried Kracauer which has remained, in terms of broad methodological and interpretive assumptions, dominant as a general approach to popular culture. That is to say that popular films are, in part at least, governed by mass desire and that such desire operates on an unconscious as well as a conscious level:

> 'What films reflect are not so much explicit credos as psychological dispositions - those deep layers of collective mentality which extend more or less below the dimension of consciousness.'[29]

Furthermore, the significance of this approach in direct proportion to the continuity of popular aesthetic conventions:

> 'What counts is not so much the statistically measurable popularity of films as the popularity of their pictorial and narrative motifs. Persistent reiteration of these motifs marks them as outward projections of inner urges. And they obviously carry most symptomatic weight when they occur in both popular and unpopular films, in grade B pictures as well as in super-productions.'[30]

Kracauer's work, while it is not addressed to a genre proper, is thus even more applicable to genres and cycles with well-defined visual and auditory motifs, themes, narrative structures etc. Although From Caligari to Hitler is a work which avoids being more than implicit about the relevance of any specific psycho-analytical theory (Freud appears in the index only once, and then by way of a non-technical matter), psycho-analysis has dominated explanations of this nature since. In particular, the idea that horror films persist in the manner of dreams or nightmares remains central in current discussion and is explicitly invoked by Robin Wood at the outset of his influential essays in The American Nightmare:

> 'Popular films, then, respond to interpretation as at once the personal dreams of their makers and the collective dreams of their audiences - the fusion made possible by the shared structures of a common ideology. It becomes easy, if this is granted, to offer a simple definition of horror films: they are our collective nightmares. The condition under which a dream becomes a nightmare are (a) that the repressed wish is, from the point of view of consciousness, so terrible that it must be repudiated as loathsome, and (b) that it is so strong and powerful as to constitute a serious threat.'[31]

Other aspects of the general conditions of viewing films at the cinema, darkness, relaxation into a fantasy experience, are invoked as supportive of this idea. Moreover, while the popular cinema can generally be said to have incorporated psycho-analytical ideas and themes (to the point at which films such as Martin Scorsese's

After Hours (1985) make little sense without such a prior knowledge of their significance), horror films have always traded in imagery crucial to the Freudian tradition. Drawing upon Ernest Jones's famous examination of nightmare imagery,[32] Noel Carrol has reaffirmed the usefulness of Freudian theory as follows:

> 'I would argue that it is appropriate to use psycho-analysis in relation to the horror film, because within our culture the horror genre is explicitly acknowledged as a vehicle for expressing psycho-analytically significant themes such as repressed sexuality, oral sadism, necrophilia, etc. ...As a matter of social tradition, psycho-analysis is more or less the lingua franca of the horror film and thus the privileged critical tool for discussing the genre. In fact, horror films often seem to be little more than bowdlerized, pop psycho-analysis, so enmeshed is Freudian psychology with the genre.'[33]

Perhaps the most celebrated instance of this is to be found in Forbidden Planet (Fred McLeod Wilcox:1956) in which the monster, spawned as the projected and uncontrollable underside of an intellectual's mental activities, is straightforwardly designated as 'from the ID'. It can be noted without risk of controversy that, since the war, there has been a general intrusion of 'technical' psycho-analytical material into the horror film in which, at a superficial level at least, there are often attempts to explain events in terms of the psychological or environmental rather than by resorting to the metaphysical categories of good and evil.

Charles Derry, considering this tendency as 'The Horror of Personality'

points to a decreasing symbolism of the monstrous towards personal explanation. Thus the horror film resorts to the postulation of psychoses - to neurotics and schizophrenics as often as vampires and werewolves. A film which deals with this issue in a self-conscious blend of nostalgia and revulsion is Peter Bogdanovich's Targets (1967) in which a bright, day-time world of sterile, contemporary American consumer-culture harbours a madman who is outwardly the bland personification of masculine normality. The dispassionate manner in which he proceeds to kill his immediate family and then total strangers (from the safe distance of a sniper's vantage point) is contrasted with the Gothic imagery surrounding his unlikely nemesis, an old Hollywood horror star played by Boris Karloff.

The Monster and Normality

If the horror film has altered over time to accommodate such changes of perception of the monstrous, it has been argued nonetheless that the basic structure, and perhaps function, of the genre has not. This is the assertion made by Robin Wood in making a persuasive claim to have defined the horror genre in terms of its structural constants. In his article entitled The Return of the Repressed,[34] he offers '...a simple and obvious basic formula for the horror film: normality is threatened by the Monster.' Where normality is used in a non-evaluative sense to mean 'conformity to the dominant social norms.'

Monstrous figures provide an obvious point of continuity throughout the horror genre, providing a central source of

fascination for audiences and a foundation for much generically-interested theoretical and critical work. Many of these figures are immediately recognizable as corrupt variations on the human form itself: from the dark features of the Gothic villain and the roughly-assembled form of Frankenstein's creature, to the confused physiology of the Fly, we understand at once the relationship of anatomy and morality/ideology. Guilt and transgression are displaced onto the body; the monstrous intention or act giving birth to the monstrous form. In the Hollywood cinema the Studio System's capitalization upon recognizable formula entertainment has seen the periodic (owing to the cyclical ascendancy of the horror genre) establishment and popularization of certain key monsters which provide an obvious Iconographical core within the field. For instance, during the Universal cycle of the thirties, the figures of Dracula, the Frankenstein creature and the Wolf Man become so popular that they were eventually incorporated into painfully contrived narratives by the mid-forties in which all three vied for attention,[35] and in the fifties cycle of S.F. horror the Creature from the Black Lagoon (Jack Arnold:1954) enjoyed the reprieve afforded by two sequels. The current horror movement offers a similar core of figures ranging from the generalized 'undead' to be found in the zombie films or the numerous 'Devil Children' spawned after The Exorcist (William Friedkin:1973) or the still-popular figure of Freddy Krueger in the 'Elm Street' films.

According to the model offered by Wood, however, we can place this kind of anthropomorphic monster on an equal footing with other phenomena of a monstrous and threatening nature by virtue of their

shared function: as a challenge to established definitions of normality and the status quo in terms of physical damage to bodies or property and to accepted values. Thus we can include Evil Spirits, extra-terrestrials, viruses and giant insects within the same category and may, following Wood, make significant associations with similar character functions in other genres, e.g. the use of Red Indians in the western. The iconographical weight of the monstrous in the horror, its sheer presence and the audience's anticipation of that presence has been posited as crucial by many, for instance, Lawrence Alloway, pointing out that originality of plot is an unnecessary quality in the horror film, argues that it is the observed destructiveness of the monstrous which we desire: 'The reasons for making and witnessing monster films is the visibility of the monster, the damage to persons and property, the suggestion of rape as the monster carries off the girl.'[36]

It is this central presence of the monster which has proved crucial to psycho-analytical interpretations of the genre since Ernest Jones's exploration of the psychological significance of popular folk monsters such as vampires and werewolves in On the Nightmare.[37] Drawing more upon the meta-psychological works of Freud rather than those of individual psychology, writers like Wood have proposed the recurrence of the monstrous as the inevitable and symbolic return of culturally denied, but psychologically inextinguishable desires and impulses. Taking assumptions from recent sociological applications of Freudian theory (Herbert Marcuse, Gad Horovitz), Wood develops the idea of the monster as the 'Return of the Repressed' where it functions to articulate the ideas and

values which, at a particular historical moment, are held to be taboo or destructive to society. This approach extends beyond the more commonly-held Freudian interpretations which focus almost exclusively upon the notion of repressed sexuality (e.g. Margaret Tarrat:Monsters from the Id, Gerard Lenne:Monster and Victim[38]), to offer the figure and activities of the monster as a broader and more sociologically-inclusive version of the psycho-analytical postulate, the 'Other'. Although this term may be understood in a variety of ways, it is here being proposed as anything, any desire or value or activity which is outside of the dominant ideology of our society. According to Freudian theory, such desires are not destroyed, but are instead repressed into the Unconscious where they remain active and constantly in search of some form of expression, commonly finding a coded or symbolic (and thus safe) outlet in the substance of dreams. This argument is here applied to the products of popular culture in the assumption that the collective, and repressed desires of our culture are able to effect some similar type of re-emergence in the obsessive formulaic patterns of collectively-endorsed fictions. Extending notions of the 'Other' to include the most fundamental categories which threaten the basic structures of our society, Wood explains the monster's frequent associations with, in particular, Woman, Alternative cultures and ethnic groups, Alternative political and ideological systems, Children and Alternative sexuality; especially bisexuality and homosexuality.

Pursuing this approach, we can begin to clarify the question of the monster's relation to the established normality in the horror film which Wood characterizes as the genre's 'essential subject'. The

monster, rather than being understood, in its threatening image, as something purely external to society is, instead, the symbolic articulation of deeply-held desires generated within it. These desires are then, in psycho-analytic terms, projected onto an image so appalling that it evokes disgust and rejection and which, especially within the narrative structures of popular fictions, may be destroyed or rendered harmless.

What follows quite logically from this, is that we can now provide a basis for understanding some of the recurrent features of the monstrous at a fairly general level of significance. In essence these revolve around the key issue of ambivalence which operates around the relationship: monster/normality, and which produce a far from straightforward sympathetic response from the viewer. We are forced to acknowledge that, for all the horrific material involved, we are nonetheless attracted to it in the first place; that we are both fascinated and disgusted by the very same thing. This suggests the guilt which accompanies the recognition of pleasure in socially proscribed experiences and thus a mixed emotional response. The activity and features of the monstrous bear a frequent testimony to this, being imbued with certain features which remain in the memory of the audience long after the often innocuous details of their victors are forgotten. The suggestion of an irrepressible force is common, for example. If the monster is eventually defeated it is usually through implausible methods and luck, whereas it is always the case that the monster is possessed of extraordinary powers, size, strength or determination. In fact, in the latter instance - as is the case of the Halloween, Fridy the Thirteenth and Nightmare on

Elm Street cycles of recent years - the determination or persistence extends to a seeming refusal to die both in individual films, where conventionally lethal injuries are sustained, and by the virtual open-endedness of the cycles. Thus the values of normality seem fragile in comparison. The ambivalence is carried further, according to Wood both by the fact that the monster is rarely presented devoid of any redeeming features or qualities,[x] and by the fact that we actually desire to see the status quo overturned: 'Central to the effect and fascination of horror films is their fulfilment of our nightmare wish to smash the norms that oppress us and which our moral conditioning teaches us to revere.'[39]

Looking back over the history of the genre one can readily observe a further, central source of ambivalence which occurs in the theme and figure of the double which has surfaced persistently from the Gothic, through German Expressionism to the present. The idea of the doppleganger is that of the shadow-figure or mirror image which the Monster comes to represent, suggesting the latter's inseparability from Normality. Thus the protagonist may frequently be linked, via actions and imagery of a parallel nature, to the Monster which he superficially is opposed to and morally/ ideologically divorced from. Both Wood and Noel Carrol place great emphasis upon this phenomenon and Carrol, in an article devoted to the psycho-analytical significance of related aspects of the horrific, employs the term 'symbolic biology' to describe what he argues is a process with two fundamental possibilities each of which

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[x] This even applies to Freddy Krueger of the Nightmare on Elm Street films, who is a child-murdering, supernatural psychopath who unrelentingly kills a succession of youths in horrible ways. His black sense of humour and strong sense of style have engendered a cult following which forms the basis of current advertising campaigns, which retain this approach, e.g. the present badges which proclaim: 'Heeeerrrre's Freddy'.

is an attempt to organize the competing values and desires of the genre: 'The fantastic beings of horror films can be seen as symbolic formations that organize conflicting themes that are simultaneously attractive and repulsive. Two major symbolic structures appear most prominent in this regard: fusion, in which the conflicting themes are yoked together in one, spatio-temporally unified figure; and fission, in which the conflicting themes are distributed - over space or time - among more than one figure.'[40] In this schema the fission principle is exemplified by the use of doubling as in the Jekyll and Hyde narrative and corresponding to the phenomenon of projection in its operations, i.e. values held to be loathsome but which are nonetheless generated by the subject's own desires are projected, in what is identified by Freud as one of the basic characteristics of dream-language, onto the image of something which is then safely felt to be 'Other'. Similarly, the fusion principle engages the dreamwork known as condensation in which the disturbing and the acceptable are often integrated into the same image: for instance, in Carrol's account of the Dracula figure which is '⌈A⌋ fusion of conflicting attributes of the bad (primal) father and the rebellious son which is simultaneously appealing and forbidding because of the way it conjoins different dimensions of the Oedipal fantasy.'[41] On a more simple level, Carol cites the fused 'symbolic biology' of half-creatures, e.g. The Fly, or men/machines into which category we might include cyborgs such as The Terminator. (See Chapter Five for details and analyses of these two films).

This overview of the major theoretical contributions to the understanding of the genre has been necessary in order that we might

clarify the fundamental assumptions which currently prevail in the field, and then proceed to evaluate their adequacy in relation to the contemporary horror film, any consideration of which must take full account of the quite considerable shifts in emphasis that it has undergone during its 'renaissance' throughout the 'seventies and 'eighties. Despite the persistence of certain iconographical elements - notably those deriving from the Gothic tradition - taxonomic approaches to the genre, which attempt to provide a central core of enduring themes and images, are of minor assistance in understanding the genre today. Of greater assistance are those methods and theories which, in identifying persistent textual structures and constructions of subjectivity, have pointed to a central preoccupation of the horrific: a deeply felt uncertainty about the nature of the self. There exists, the ever-present sense, in our fascination with the monstrous, and in its narrative links with the normality in which the subject is conventionally constructed, of a self which is perceived as divided; the narrative structure of the horror film is devoted to resolving conflicts originating from this dilemma.

While I do not take exception to the notion that the genre continues to thrive by rehearsing anxieties located around the loss of self-control, or of the assault upon the sense of the unified subject, it is necessary to point, now, to what appear to be severe limitations in applying this, without further qualification, to the genre as it stands today. The following observations and assertions are of absolute importance to this thesis and their substantiation is at the heart of the chapters which follow.

1) The conception of the subject upon which Freudians have based their arguments is, for the most part, one which has failed to account for the historical nature of the theoretical discourse itself. This is to say that in any properly materialist approach to the problem, there has to be an allowance for, or acknowledgement of, the provisional nature of the methodological procedure used insofar as it may itself be part of broad discursive trends within our culture. Recent theoretical contributions to the debate around post-modernism and the work of post-structuralist writers such as Michel Foucault have suggested other frameworks for the consideration of subjectivity and its relation to the social process as a whole. Many of the most distinctive features of the modern horror film, its themes, images and textual operations, amount to an accumulating fascination with the destruction of a human body which has become virtually synonymous with the contemporary self. An explanation of these tendencies in the light of recent reformulations of the theory of the subject is able to provide one positive inroad into the field which avoids the pitfall of the kind of critical negativism which sees them as merely the unimaginative collapse of a once interesting genre into a debased tendency given over to providing increasingly sensationalist imagery for a jaded audience. The desire to establish positive criteria for the genre - to account for what it <u>is</u>, rather than what it is <u>not</u> doing - is the governing principle in this work. Thus, much of what follows, in addressing the imagery of bodily destruction as crucial to the horror film's socio-psychological significance, runs counter to some of the assumptions about such imagery that have arisen out of dominant theories concerning the representation or construction of

'otherness' in the horror film.

2) As outlined earlier, with reference to the works of Wood and others, the subject of the horror film has been persuasively formulated within the terms of the psychology of projection, in which there is found to be a persistent implication that the worlds of the monstrous, and of the normal, are but two facets of the same conception of the self or society. At the level of both the individual and the socio-political there is then an instigation of the act of censorship in which the personally or socially unacceptable is denied. This is generally accepted as the basis for the appalling nature of the monster. The unacceptable is rejected both through the idea of its loathsomeness and by punishment/ destruction within the terms of the narrative's resolution. The disgusting imagery of the horror film is, in this view, seldom present to serve popular interest in its most obvious and recurrent form: the hideous or tormented figure of the body. Rather, it is a convenient and repellent expression of the socially proscribed Other:

> 'One might say that the true subject of the horror genre is the struggle for all that our civilization <u>represses</u> or <u>oppresses</u>: its re-emergence dramatized, as in our nightmares, as an object of horror, a matter for terror, the 'happy ending' (when it exists) typically signifying the restoration of repression.'[42]

Yet there are two immediate problems which stem from this kind of assertion. First of all, in terms of the horror film being considered as a genre separate from others; how, if this kind of

'return of the repressed' theory with its recurrent monster versus normality structure enables the making of structural parallels with the hero/villain opposition of other genres such as the western and the crime film, do we distinguish the horror genre from other genres with similar properties?

Second, there is, inevitably following the Freudian tradition's attention to matters of sexuality as fundamental, a tendency to regard the body as primarily something to do with sexuality. This leads to a signal failure to be aware of other possible meanings which it may be productive of. The signifying properties of the body and its destruction are far from exhausted by the possibilities of the repression hypothesis and the present close attention of the genre to this kind of material has necessitated a broader outlook. Noel Carrol has asserted, against the application of this tendency to Frankenstein in order to exploit its philosophical potential above all else, that:

> '[I]f Frankenstein is part Nausea it is also nauseating. Where in the allegorical formulation can we find an explanation for the purpose of the unsettling effect of the charnel-house imagery.'[43]

However, if Carrol goes on to state an intention to 'study the nightmare conflicts embodied in the horror film as having broader reference to simple sexuality', he nonetheless makes little attempt to move beyond Freudian approaches to disgust with the body. In an effort to do this we must, I believe, approach the subject with a fresh eye. While there are plainly continuities with the past which

make the foregoing theories valuable, if not indispensable, at times, a close examination of typical trends and works in the genre suggest a variety of dominant themes and images that are equally if not more important to their understanding.

At the focus of this understanding is the figure of the body. All Hollywood style film-making is centred around the body or bodies. Their centrality cannot be taken for granted, yet, outside the relatively recent body of work which has attended to issues of Star signification and of cinematic space, most of the approaches to the subject have been governed by questions of sexuality necessitated by feminist re-evaluations of popular cinema in which the horror film has, perhaps inevitably been dismissed as sexist. Concern that bodies under attack in the genre are too often those of eroticized women has, however, led to sweeping assumptions about the body in general. This work attempts to find other possibilities for its consideration.

In particular, an examination of the body's potential as a symbol capable of articulating feelings of integrity or dis-integrity which betray an idea of contemporary subjectivity, is one of the first tasks at hand. The symbolic possibilities of the destruction of the body are explored in Chapter Three by using reference to the work of the anthropologist Mary Douglas, opening up questions of its social significance. Before this can be undertaken, Chapter Two, will develop the importance of the body as a site of fascination in contemporary horror after some discussion of the popular basis of cinematic horror. This takes into account the central role of the consumers of horror films and the need to be aware of their interest in the destruction of the body.

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References : Chapter One (cont.)

15 (cont.) instance, in considering the consequences of the subject/object relationship in cinematic voyeurism and its role in confirming gender differentiation.

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CHAPTER TWO

THE CONTEMPORARY HORROR FILM AS A POPULAR GENRE

Popular Genre

Genre studies, despite the accumulating value of its contribution to film studies, is a branch of aesthetics which encompasses a variety of conflicting critical and theoretical positions, ranging from the dogmatically idealist to the pragmatic. It therefore becomes essential to clarify the kind of approach taken in this study.

First of all, as is apparent from certain aspects of the first Chapter, I make little attempt to adhere to what might be referred to as the Aristotelian or classical model of genre. In this, as, for example in the case of an established and strict form such as the sonnet, it is accepted that certain definite formal principles must obtain for the definition to hold, e.g. fourteen lines, rhyming couplet, iambic pentameter etc.., and that there will be a corresponding observance of traditional content, romantic love... This model is the kind that Andrew Tudor has referred to as belonging to critics rather than film goers and it is the shifting preferences of the latter which form the basis of a kind of rapport between Industry and audience that necessitates a different approach to

a genre.[1]

Classicism, frequently allied to attempts to lay down evaluative criteria by establishing norms - one thinks, for example, of Bazin's defence of Stagecoach in this respect[2] - risks embalming cultural production at a particular state in its development. This, as a rule, is an active obstruction to the wider implications of generic change over time. This type of classical model tends to override questions of changing cultural production. Whereas we must, in the case of popular cinema, attend to questions of art as mass production under capitalism. The application of the Aristotelian model, with its insistence upon fixed forms and styles determined in the main by a narrow cultural élite of experts is manifestly inadequate for understanding the development and operation of cinematic genres. It is an idealist fallacy to paralyze, for critical purposes, the defining qualities of a genre at a moment in its development, simply because it appears to have achieved a sufficiently distinctive body of conventions by which it may be conveniently recognized. This is not to reject out of hand the kind of analysis that draws upon the assumption of an established iconography, recurrent themes and structures etc. Rather it is to emphasize the provisional nature of these, which may lose effectivity over the years and be displaced by, or interact with, other conventions. Change of this nature is guaranteed by the industrial system in which the films are produced, and which determines not only what is made and how, but also, in large part, how it is read or understood by its anticipated audience.

The use of popular genres or formulas in Hollywood has been one of the enduring cornerstones of its effort to function as a commercial institution. Recent writings have begun to move beyond the traditional limits of genre criticism which often ignores the industrial context of popular genre even when attempting to provide a more materialist approach by theorizing the genre/ideology relationship.[3] Thus it is essential to insist upon the role played by genre in the overall process by which narrative cinema is produced as a commodity. If we conceive of the Hollywood-style system of film production as an example of what Metz terms the 'cinematic institution' whereby it is understood as:

> '[N]ot just the cinema industry (which works to fill cinemas not to empty them), it is also the mental machinery - another industry - which spectators "accustomed to the cinema" have internalized historically and which has adapted them to the consumption of films.'[4]

then we can identify the crucial roles genres have played in that institution as an indispensable part of both production and consumption. Although it is impossible to separate these areas in their actual functioning, we may, for convenience here, define two broad areas (following Metz) in which they operate as almost inevitable factors in commercial film-making and film-going respectively: production and consumption.

Although the industry in Hollywood no longer operates along the lines of the Studio system exemplified by the eight majors in their heyday,[5] the development of genres can be seen as an essential part

of that system's striving for economic stability. As in other forms of mass production, this involved the need to achieve a consistency in terms of the product and the most efficient return upon capital investment. Genre-orientated methods of production facilitated this in a number of ways:

a) Studios were able to maximize their use of existing capital tied up in the properties they owned. Sets, stars, props, costumes, technicians, writers and directors with particular capabilities or features could be drawn upon repeatedly to produce a product recognizably similar to one which had proven viable at the box office. This re-use of existing materièle, especially in the use of stars, sets etc. contributed massively to the establishing of continuity in visual imagery which, centering on issues of iconography, has played a large role in earlier accounts of cinematic genre.[6] Thus, to take the case of the horror film, we find in the cycle of films produced at Universal in the thirties, the repeated use of the same Transylvanian sets, castles etc. We find the similar repetition of the figures of the Frankenstein monster, the wolfman and Dracula, played by Boris Karloff, Lon Chaney Jr. and Bela Lugosi respectively, culminating in films which combined them all. Plainly, there is a number of particular instances in which this part of a genre's development raises questions about the accommodations of 'house style', i.e. the extent to which genres have specifically benefited from their indulgence at a particular studio or to which critical attempts to define and analyze them at certain moments have privileged the works of the greatest degree of consistency which may, in turn, be a function of house style. One thinks, for instance, of the Universal melodramas of the 'fifties

directed by Douglas Sirk or the M.G.M. musical produced by the Freed unit in the same period.

b) Given the stability of the studio system, with its capacity for greater long-term planning than the independent production conditions of later years, genre offered a basis for estimating profits beyond the immediate returns of a single venture. Profit was, according to Stephen Neale:

> '[C]alculated not in relation to individual films, but rather to series of films, those produced within a particular timespan or within a particular cycle of production...[G]enres serve as basic and 'convenient' units for the calculation of investment and profit, and as basic and 'convenient' categories in which to organize capital assets so as to ensure that their capacity will be utilized to the maximum.'[7]

c) If there is a hierarchy of influences which tends to operate in the industry, it is nonetheless apparent that, contrary to the more romantic conceptions of artistic production which privilege, say, the director, the production of the typical feature film is to a considerable extent something of a collective endeavour. This was pointed out by Kracauer in respect of Weimar cinema and to a large degree it may be said to apply to Hollywood:

> '[F]ilms are never the product of an individual...Since any film production unit embodies a mixture of heterogeneous interests and inclinations, team-work in this field tends to exclude arbitrary handling of screen

> material, suppressing individual peculiarities in favour of traits common to many people.'[8]

The complex and protracted realization of even the most routine Hollywood film draws upon ever greater legions of contributors who may, even in a minor fashion, exert some influence via their specific skill or their opinion. (A major, recent example is that of the independent special effects men whose determination of the contemporary horror and science fiction genres is of the greatest significance for this project). Furthermore, the point about the collective forces of production extends not only to those directly involved in the shooting or planning of the film, but also those who make decisions about it insofar as it is a commodity aimed at a projected audience. Jowett and Linton describe how films are modified in their conception by the various links in the chain of the production process; the division of labour in the system produces a progression of mediating impressions of the film's possible nature:

> '[A]rtists were controlled by what the producers thought, the producers were controlled by what the distributors thought (or what the producers expected the distributors to think), the distributors were controlled by what they thought the cinema owners thought and the cinema owners were controlled by what they thought the audience wanted.'[9]

Alongside stars, characters, plots and directors, genre is one of the chief discourses which operates as a kind of common sense language for non-technical discussion of the cinema, and thus provides one such frame of reference within which this kind of exchange may take place.

If the latter process is one which is still in operation, it is the case that the stable economic and industrial base, which saw the foundation of the major popular cinematic genres, and which in particular guaranteed the production of stylistically consistent examples in many cases, is no longer in evidence. If this is so, it is nevertheless true that genre still figures largely as one of the industry's central organizing principles. It is worth pointing out some of the ways in which it has functioned in relation to some of the key shifts in the style of production. Without digressing at length on the details of the changes in Hollywood's industrial base since the 'Paramount case',[10] certain developments are of special interest here owing to their direct bearing on the question of generic evolution; why some genres persist with a continuing, if aesthetically modified vitality, while others lie dormant or appear to be virtually extinct. The horror film and the western, respectively, may serve as convenient instances. If the former manages to remain viable it is perhaps substantially due to the fact that, unlike the latter, it is relatively free from the historical and geographical constraints which hamper the genre's accommodation of changing tastes in the audience. The myth of the western may continue, in its classic confrontation between the values of Civilization and Savagery, Community and Individual etc., but attempts to place it in its traditional setting are notoriously unsuccessful at the box office. The horror film is bound only by its mandate to horrify or disgust and the customary location of those experiences around questions of the self and the body; the relevance and contemporaneity of the genre is, then, guaranteed by the flexibility of its conventions.

But there are also industrial factors which have contributed to the endurance and modification of the horror film. Leaving aside the fact that relaxations of censorship practices permit experimentation with more explicitly disturbing material,[x] the development of the horror genre as an increasingly sensational form has been firmly rooted in the production practices opened up by the demise of the old studio system.

One of the most significant ways in which horror has developed is through its establishment as one of the cornerstones of exploitation films have more recently been subjected to serious critical attention and efforts have been made to provide an initial outline of their industrial and aesthetic development. In the most substantial of these, Jim Hillier and Aaron Lipstadt offer one definition in which exploitation films '[A]re those made quickly and cheaply to capitalize (sensationally) on some current event that has captured the public's imagination.'[11] This usually involves the inauguration of a particular cycle or phase of a genre rather than the establishment of a wholly new one. Sometimes it is as a direct response to recognizable social or political phenomena (biker movies or the current spate of Vietnam revenge films, for example), or it may be the runaway success of an individual picture which invites an attempt to cash in on the key aspects of its audience appeal (Star Wars (George Lucas:1977) may be considered the initiator of the continuing Sci-Fi boom and of many of its specific formal properties).

Although these tendencies can be traced back in some measure to the origins of Hollywood cinema, their situation within a specific

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[x]This, of course, is no less true of the rest of Hollywood production.

economic and industrial base does not really occur until the late 'fifties when the domination of Hollywood distribution and exhibition by the eight major studios had eased to the point at which wholly independently produced products could guarantee themselves a place in the market. Horror, as a genre, benefited from the suitability of its typical style and subject matter to the demands of exploitation. Compared to other genres like the musical, it remained an inexpensive proposition, needing little in terms of sets and technical complexity to fulfil its essential purpose. Similarly, the trend towards increasingly explicit gore can be traced to the appeal to the sensational which exploitation films have always indulged. The relegation of questions of taste to an incidental aspect of production produced an accentuation of the genre's graphic exploitation of violence and gore. Exploitation films in general rely heavily upon the delivery of highly recognizable motifs which are promised in advance by hard-sell imagery in the publicity material:

> '[T]he movies are directed at a defined market sector, promising a certain expected combination of action, sex and comedy in various proportions, the prominent selling point being a suggestive title and poster or trailer campaign at the theatre or drive-in.'[12]

The drive-in phenomenon of the 'fifties points to one of the important features of exploitation, that of its targeting of audiences. Aided by the drive-in as the focal part of their culture, the youth market became the first major line of attack. Later, the output from the variety of exploitation sources was targeted at other viable sectors of society such as blacks. This is important in

the way that the horror film can also be seen as a genre with a certain specific constituency. Unlike, say, the crime movie, horror is, more often than not, a genre to categorically enjoy or dislike and avoid. Correspondingly, the pleasure of horror as a particular kind of enjoyment is celebrated in far greater and more organized manner than is virtually any other genre. Fan clubs and magazines are the most obvious manifestations of the horror audience's existance as a self-aware and specific catchment which can be targeted by the industry in a relatively straightforward way.

Unlike the audience expectation involved in 'quality' or big-budget film production, the manufacture and consumption of exploitation films - with certain exceptions - is tailored towards the almost wholly predictable. Genre production of any kind, the deployment of familiar conventions, is always subject to the demands for a certain kind of product differentiation. The need for a film, as a commodity, to be distinguishable from other products, and the desire for the simultaneous establishment of pleasurably familiar experiences form the basis of, in the words of Stephen Neale, the 'double-edged' aspect of genre, '[I]n which a rule-bound element and an element of transgression are both equally important.'[13] This can be re-qualified in a more precise manner by insisting that it is the presence of these two aspects rather than their proportionate equality which is essential.

Exploitation tends towards the repetitive, and in its sensationalizing use of the most evidently appealing/shocking features of a genre, has had a concentrating effect upon certain

elements of the horror film which now predominate. The contemporary horror film, at least as far as visual conventions are concerned, has significantly benefited from the early exploitation film's experimentation with bodily destruction. Unlike the restraint and frequent concern for good taste which accompanies much early horror, the exploitation market relied heavily upon the promise of precisely the most disreputable and lurid elements of the genre. These are distilled in the crudest and most economical manner possible as poster motifs or titles such as: The Flesh Eaters (Jack Curtis: 1964), Bloodthirsty Butchers (Andy Milligan:1969), I Eat your Skin (Del Tenney: 1971) and, perhaps the most succinct yet, Horror and Sex (Rene Cardona: 1969).

Although the horror film today, in its continuing success at the box office, can seldom be described as exploitation film and has, in the wake of films like The Fly (David Cronenberg:1986) achieved critical praise rarely given to the genre, there are several immediate ways in which the current body of work is fairly directly in the debt of the prototypical 'splatter movies' of 'sixties efforts by the likes of Herschell Gordon Lewis whose Blood Feast (1963), often cited as the first of the line, achieved a recent and telling moment of notoriety when its re-issue on cassette saw it being included in the Director of Public Prosecution's list of 'Video Nasties'.

First of all, there is the focusing of appeal in the horror, directly upon gore. This involves not simply the increase in the level of violent acts, although this may be partly inevitable, but a more sustained fascination with the human body's ritual destruction.

Secondly, this is conducted, not within the terms of an atmosphere of revulsion or disgust per se, but is often accompanied by humour ranging from the black, subtle and ironic to high camp. (The horror audience has always been closer to the comedy audience than any other in its awareness of itself, in the cinema at least, as an audience, reacting en masse to the experience of the film and breaking at times with the film itself to look around at the reactions of others to that experience).

Thirdly, the initiation of a new realm of special effects designed to facilitate the manipulation of the body. As I shall argue later, the significance of this goes beyond their instrumental nature as merely 'enabling' technology and extends to the fundamental signifying processes of the modern horror film as a genre.

New Flesh : The Destruction of the Body in 'Splatter' Films

If it is evident that popular genres are subject to constant revision and adaptation, it is seldom the case that the nature and significance of these inflections are immediately apparent. With hindsight the horror film has often shown a desire to focus attention on the body's more vulnerable and disturbing features, but instances of excess are too often ignored or declaimed against by those for whom such material is an offence against good taste, morality and aesthetic principles. While this thesis is fundamentally concerned to establish criteria for understanding the present emphasis on bodily destruction as the genre's most significant development, this too, may be traced through a history of accumulating fascination in the area, which has accelerated throughout the last twenty years of

the horror film's evolution. Until recently, horror films exhibiting an unalloyed interest in the details of physical damage were seldom acceptable as legitimate examples of the genre by critical commentators, even when endorsed by fans at the box office. Attacks upon products of this kind range from claims of bad taste and degeneracy, loss of the genre's poetic principle to the demands of a crass realism and charges of encouraging anti-social behaviour among afficionados. The fairly representative response of British writer C.A. Lejeune in her contemporary review of Hammer's Horror of Dracula (Terence Fisher:1958) included the following: 'I feel inclined to apologize to all decent Americans for sending them a work in such sickening bad taste.'[14] The horror film's raw material, its basic intentions, the ever-shifting nature of what is perceived as horrific are a source of provocation which guarantees the perpetual renewal of such responses. Similarly, the 'moral panic' generated under the auspices of the recent 'Video Nasty' controversy is a reminder of the persistence of the 'effects' theory both as an academic and popular response to renewed vitality in the area of horror.

While it is unscrupulous simply to dismiss all such 'inconvenient' areas of antagonism on the basis of their frequent illogicality and inconsistency, they are nonetheless responsible for much of the failure to examine the products singled out for attack with anything more than the most cursory of approaches. Occasional examples of horrific material are accepted if they are contained or understood within particular, 'legitimate' reading frameworks. The horrors of the concentration camp, for instance, acceptable within the

documentary/authorship/art movie context of Resnais' Nuit et Brouillard (1955) are a cause for summary dismissal of S.S. Experiment Camp (Sergio Garrone:1982) in which they are exploited for purposes of popular entertainment. Similarly, scenes comparable to the notorious 'eyeball slitting' scene in Bunuel's Un Chien Andalou (1928) may provoke greater outrage when denuded of their surrealist justifications. This is not to argue for an approach to the subject that allows us to situate these films within some all-embracing category. Rather it is a question of breaking away from such limiting definitions to such an extent as to be able to alert ourselves to the possible significances of all such imagery in the cinema and in the horror film especially. This is to argue for an attempt to explain the existence and fascinations of horrific material irrespective of preconceived standards of good taste etc. (It must be said immediately, however, that there is always a certain component of interest inspired by the mere fact of a product's capacity to be designated as bad taste or to contain taboo subject matter). We need to be able to understand the emergence of the modern horror film as one based on bodily destruction, as a genre presently devoted to the construction of explicit and detailed instances of assault, mutation, dissection and decomposition of the human - or occasionally alien - anatomy. In order to do this, we must move away from considerations of such imagery as excess and proceed to regard them as the norm in the modern horror film.

Signs have appeared of such a change of attitude taking place with the emergence of several serious publications on the subject; the Body Horror issue of Screen and two collections of writings on

the work of David Cronenberg[15] for example, all attempt some sort of engagement with a perceived sense of change in the contemporary horrific. There are several major aspects of the genre in its present state which need elaborating upon, but perhaps the most immediate and obvious is the sheer fact of its visual explicitness with regard to the portrayal of gory events. Writing on the output of Hammer Studios, David Pirie points out the longstanding reaction to the graphic which has obscured the importance of its recurrence in the genre:

> 'When people complain of sadism in Hammer, they are rarely referring to sadism in its literal sense; they mean simply that the film is showing too much, for as Burke expressed it, "to make anything very terrible, obscurity seems in general to be necessary". The most frequently voiced cliché in all writing about horror films to date has been based on this assumption that things shown are necessarily less impressive than things suggested; and like all really damaging clichés it has a basis in truth. In certain kinds of horror - especially the Victorian ghost story and its offshoots like Night of the Demon or The Innocents, to reveal your hand is to destroy a carefully wrought effect and this is the lineage which Dr Varma in The Gothic Flame calls the 'Radcliffian mode'. But there is another equally respectable Gothic line... including M.G. Lewis, Mary Shelley, Bram Stoker and all grand guignol theatre which precisely depends on the clear visual portrayal of every stage of the action. (This latter tradition is referred to by Varma as the 'Schauer

Romantik' school P.B.)

(A Heritage of Horror:D. Pirie)[16]

Pirie is correct in avoiding the conflation of anatomical destruction with sadism for there is an expanding body of work produced since the time of his writing which displays little interest in the kind of sexually-charged physical violence implied. Lately, the accumulating interest in, and acknowledgement of, films which celebrate gory spectacle for its own sake has spawned a veritable subculture of devotees, some of whose preoccupation with instances of gory excess overrules all other criteria of excellence. So familiar have films catering to this kind of taste become that they are frequently referred to by casually applied pseudo-generic terms. Gore Pic, Meat Movie, Stalk and Slash Movie are common, but it is perhaps Splatter Movie that has achieved pre-eminence, inspiring an entire book devoted to cataloguing and explaining the field: Splatter Movies by John McCarty.[17] Although written within the style of the enthusiast, rather than that of the academic, the book takes it upon itself to attempt a kind of revisionist history of the genre where - in support of Pirie's point about the gore tradition - the present penchant for explicit physical horror is placed at the end of the line of gory precedents which are traceable to the Grand Guignol theatre which originated in France in 1899. This is not an original claim in itself since it is common for works on the horror film to cite the same,[18] but unlike the usual tendency to quote it as the source of the horror film per se, McCarty is placing it as the inauguration of a specific strand of the genre which has caught momentum via a limited series of agents over

the years. This runs an uneven line from Grand Guignol through the Hammer films, the work of Herschell Gordon Lewis in the early 'sixties and then through a modern gallery of auteurs commencing with George Romero and including the achievements of effects men such as Tom Savini. In between there are mentions, of a substantial kind, for non-horror films which are hailed as landmarks in the development of Splatter. What is of interest here is not so much the rather dubious, non-materialist evolutionary approach but the fact that films hitherto regarded as unrelated or aberrant are now able to be unified under the auspices of a particular sensibility. There is a reading context, a particular hermeneutic capable of integrating The Wild Bunch (Sam Peckinpah:1969), Blood Feast (H.G. Lewis:1963) and Pink Floyd The Wall (Alan Parker:1982) by the common elements of Splatter and this is based around the imagery of the body's destruction. In one form or another this has become the raw material of the horror film having finally moved into the big league of commercial success where a large budget horror film can prove lucrative enough to merit the production of entire cycles such as the Elm Street or Friday the Thirteenth films which, far from becoming less explicit with their increasing 'legitimacy', have maintained or extended their repertoire of atrocities.

Two factors - a steady decline in levels of cinematic censorship, and the constant fascination of new attempts at aesthetic realism - have exerted a largely obstructive influence in approaching the issue of contemporary body horror. Without dismissing them entirely they should not prevent us from examining the field for signs of other, more poetic, or symbolic possibilities as we routinely proceed to do with other genres. One area in which

we can start to do this is that of special effects; what kinds of effects are being striven for and how they are being read by their audiences.

Splatter Effects

The technology for creating shock effects in the cinema has enjoyed a long and ingenious history as part of a desire audiences have always displayed for being tricked. It is common enough for the cinema to be traced back to two competing aesthetic impulses founded by the brothers Lumière and by Georges Méliès and comprising what Siegfried Kracauer has termed the realistic and formative tendencies respectively.[19] Special cinematic effects, seen as developing out of the Méliès school has, more often than not, been understood as an art or science whose achievements are directly proportional to their unobtrusiveness. John Brosnan's history of the field describes how Hollywood acted in an institutional manner, in the heyday, to curtail public knowledge of techniques and artistry:

> 'The studios, not wanting to spoil their illusions, did their best to restrict information relating to effects work. Even as late as 1947 the principles behind rear projection were being kept under wraps, causing a writer to observe at the time that, "...these background 'movies' have been the subject of serious studio censorship with magazine writers either refused a view of them or permitted to see them only after swearing not to tell". Not that special effects men seemed to mind, on the contrary, many seemed to agree with the prevailing opinion. Farciot Edouart wrote in 1942 that: "...most of

> us are sincerely anxious to live down yesterday's publicity that branded special process specialists as camera magicians. The highest praise to any of us is the comment that one of our shots creates such a perfect illusion of reality that nobody takes it for a process shot".'[20]

The utilization of effects in this way is commensurate with the maintaining of an unbroken sense of diegetic reality that is one of the central claims of writers who define Hollywood-style film-making as a specific textual and institutional practice.[21] But Brosnan immediately points out that it is the fantasy traditions in film-making - which encompasses the horror genre for purposes of special effects techniques - that 'through necessity, bring special effects out into the open';awareness of specialists and techniques in this area has always been greater than for others and has become part of the pleasurable experience in viewing and discussing such films on a popular level. The rise of the contemporary splatter movie, assisted by the post Star Wars (1977) renaissance of the science-fiction film, has spawned a corresponding para-generic field of afficionados whose interests are quite specifically catered for by a newly-emerged range of special-interest magazines. These journals, their features and advertized merchandise, fall under the descriptive terms offered by Tony Bennet in his essay Text and the Social Process[22] in which he extends Macherey's view that literary theory should be the study of 'literary phenomena within a social reality' in a way that counters the notion of texts as finite and final. The entire phenomenon of James Bond, for instance, 'exceeds the conditions of

existence' of the films and books, 'spilling over into a plethora of related texts (literary and film reviews, press articles, interviews with the author, with film stars, starlets, directors and producers) and which reaches ultimately beyond the world of texts...' (Bennet: 1982). Similarly, we may consider the terms under which the gory special effects are considered and presented in the discourses of fan-zines as at least partially determining or indicating the ways in which they are read within the film texts. The horror and Sci-Fi fan network has always enjoyed a strong sub-cultural base and the popular literature covers a wide spectrum from the respectable to the self-consciously disreputable. On the one hand there are journals such as Cinefantastique, Starburst and Fantastic Films which take a fairly broad and sober approach to their subject, and on the other there are those - the most prestigious of which is Fangoria - that celebrate the most extreme aspects of gore effects above most, if not all other, concerns.

Perhaps the first thing that can be said about them is that their existence and content provide a counter argument against realist or naturalist attempts to explain the rise of gore effects. The pleasure of the effects as effects which the magazines celebrate points up what might be described as a kind of 'naïve deconstructionism' in which the quality of the effect achieved is simultaneously applauded in its illusionism and registered precisely as such. Christian Metz has commented upon this aspect:

> 'There is then a certain duplicity attached to the very notion of trucage (theatrical trickery, P.B.). There is always something hidden inside it (since it remains truage only to the extent to that which the spectator is

> taken by surprise), and at the same time, something which flaunts itself, since it is important that the powers of cinema be credited for this astonishing of the senses.'[23]

This is further endorsed by a reversal of the previously mentioned state of obscurity of the special effects men themselves. A new cult has built up around an élite of special effects men whose peculiar talents lie in their ability to create persuasive illusions of bodily destruction or alteration. The major artists in the field are Dick Smith (The Exorcist, Scanners, The Fury), Rick Baker (The Thing, An American Werewolf in London, Thriller, Videodrome), Tom Savini (Zombies : Dawn of the Dead, Creepshow), Rob Bottin (The Howling) and, more recently, Tom Burman, Craig Reardon and Stan Winston. The work of these artists is under rapid and constant development to perfect ways of recreating the human form with anatomical correctness and plausibility in order then to expose its limitations by revealing its incapacity to withstand assault. It is the body's mysteries which are sought to be revealed; sinews, nerves, organs, bones, brain, flesh, fluids attest that we are merely the sum of our parts.

Initially, it is tempting to account for the development in this area with common-sense observations about the quest for verisimilitude; that the new skills are the culmination of a continuous effort to perfect this aspect of the horror genre. Tom Savini, for instance, claims that his experiences as a war photographer in Vietnam provide him with the background necessary for this, declaring that a particular instance in Zombies : Dawn of the Dead is an exact duplication

of a real event: 'I can assure you that arm-tearing sequence is anatomically accurate.'[24] Stuart Gordon,(director of The Re-animator)1986 - a film which in other respects owes more to Lovecraftian fantasy - reveals a similar desire to imitate the superficial appearance of human morbidity:

> 'Determined to get an element of realism into his living dead, the director actually visited morgues beforehand to get the "look" right: "Then I took some slides to show our make-up team...it paid off because the depiction of corpses in the film is much more accurate than anyone has ever done before. The standard way of portraying corpses is to paint them white or bluish grey and maybe put dark rings around their eyes. But every individual corpse looks different, just like the people. We tried to give that look to our bodies".'[25]

But for all the claims of a naturalist or realist tendency, if we move beyond questions of authorial or creative intent there are significant contextual qualifications and contradictions to this which are implicit in the typical reading frameworks.

First, there is the institutionalized fascination with trucage, with the celebration of effects as illusion or artifice promoted in fanzines and 'Making of...' films and videos; it is reasonable to suggest that for the audience there is at least a partial reading of gore illusionism as, in Tom Savini's words, '...a well done effect'. Perhaps the most influential case of this in recent years is The Making of Michael Jackson's Thriller (1984) in which the highly

successful - six months at the top of the US charts - John Landis video is followed by detailed, behind the scenes material documenting the different stages in the application of Rick Baker's special effects. The opportunity is also taken to relate this work to other films on which the artists have worked. Kobena Mercer has presented an interesting case for reading this dialectic of illusion and deconstruction as, in this case, part of a strategy for allowing the simultaneous experience of being scared and celebrating Michael Jackson's more benign star persona.[26]

Second, the composition and destruction/mutation of the body are seldom recognizable as perfectly realized in any naturalistic sense since the technical limitations of the audience's scientific knowledge are obvious. However accurate the exercise, there exists only the most unlikely chance that a member of the audience would be able to verify its authenticity beyond a certain point. The fact is that people are far more dependent upon an idea created from within the genre's own sphere of influence. Familiarity with the genre or with gore effects in general is more likely to provide the frame of reference for making judgements since the industry is always quick to capitalize upon received ideas about popular expectations. For instance, although the exploding bloodpacks of The Wild Bunch (1969) influenced the representation of gunshot wounds, the film's slow-motion fire-fights now seem more acceptable when placed in aesthetic terms. It is an impression of the body and its limits which is achieved as it is suggested by Tom Savini: 'It produces the effect, even if you don't know the anatomy, of "Yes that's the way it looks".' The most evident instance of this is in the application

of the same techniques or principles in constructing anatomies and tissues which are not human such as aliens or werewolves.

One the one hand, the creation of plausible biologies for such beings is part of the satisfactions offered by this kind of cinema, but, on the other, its real pleasures or fascinations are centred around the systematic exploration of their destruction. The body, alien or human, is the uncharted region which the contemporary horror film attempts to define. In an article written as long ago as 1960, Lawrence Alloway isolated this developing tendency as follows:

> 'The emphasis in these films is on the body as a package which can be opened. What we find fills us with awe and horror...These films are an imagery, both fantastic and highly conventional of what happens to flesh, to the fate of being a body.'[27]

It is in the exploration of that fate that the horror film again departs from mere versimilitude. Its destruction or alteration frequently involves the over-stepping of the boundaries of real tissue. We often witness an effect of physical damage wholly incommensurate with the physical cause. In Evil Dead II (Sam Raimi: 1987) a head fires an eyeball across the room when it is stamped on, a mere bite in Zombies : Dawn of the Dead (George A. Romero:1979) causes huge pieces of tissue to tear away with ease. What appears to be paramount is the desire to see the body losing control of its components, its shape and integrity. The explosive effects which are so common today celebrate the sheer incapacity of the body to

remain continent, and its dissolution is transformed into spectacle; humans are ripped apart and mutated in a welter of protracted gore in The Thing (John Carpenter:1982), John Cassavettes' entire body explodes in The Fury in a finale which is repeated in slow-motion via multiple camera set-ups, Jeff Goldblum gradually loses fingernails, teeth and ears during the metamorphosis of The Fly (David Cronenberg:1986).

But it is quite often a tone of fascination which accompanies the more extravagant of these events rather than sadism. In American Werewolf in London (John Landis:1981), The Howling (Joe Dante:1981) and Thriller (John Landis:1983),for example, the soundtrack's clear rendition of tormented ligaments and bones changing shape during the transition scenes suggest great pain, yet the agonized cries of the victim, as they merge into the howls of the wolves which they have become suggest more of an exhilaratory experience. Similarly, in the extended finale of Scanners (David Cronenberg:1980), where two telepaths conduct a mind-over-body duel by attempting to destroy each other's bodies, the scene manages to achieve a kind of gracefulness even at its most appalling as it rises to a gradual crescendo to the accompaniment of Howard Shore's original music. As the two combatant brothers face each other, we intercut to the destruction they are exacting upon each other. The eerie, hypnotic score is played at a relatively low background level as we focus, particularly, on the body of Cameron Vale (Stephen Lack). Despite appalling damage, his body moves minimally, gracefully almost, with no attempt to convey a sense of pain commensurate with his physical condition. Ideas of the horrific are qualified by this

sense of grace, as Vale assumes a posture - arms outstretched, hands on fire - suggestive of Christlike grandeur.

While there are plausible accounts of these films which view them as being narratives offering implicit political messages, notably about sexuality, few of the fanzines betray an awareness of this kind. Many of the more formulaic films - especially the 'stalk and slash', post-Halloween cycle of high school or summer camp horror films - offer a narrative which is more or less ritualistic in its adherence to form. More often the inventiveness of the film, its novelties and surprises are provided by the serial killings and their achievement via special effects rather than by plotting, style or characterization. Andrew Britton's account of a Toronto audience's response to Hell Night (Tom de Simone:1981) serves as a convenient example:

> 'It became obvious at a very early stage that every spectator knew exactly what the film was going to do at every point, even down to the order in which it would dispose of its various characters, and the screening was accompanied by something in the nature of a running commentary in which each dramatic move was excitedly broadcast some minutes before it was actually made. The film's predictability did not create boredom or disappointment. On the contrary, the predictability was clearly the main source of pleasure, and the only occasion for disappointment would have been a modulation of the formula and not the repetition of it.'[28]

On the other hand, there is a gleefully self-conscious effort to provide novel ways of causing death or mutilation. The super-strong monster/psychopath of the stalk and slash films utilizes all manner of available tools to kill with; garden implements such as shears, forks and axes are common. On a more esoteric level we are given a screwdriver in the ear in Dawn of the Dead or an explicit bisection from an elevator in Damien : Omen II (Don Taylor:1978), and in two notorious cases, we are forewarned/appetized by the titles and poster art of The Texas Chainsaw Massacre (1975) and Driller Killer (1979). So dominant is the fascination with gore and its realization that afficionados are often quite adamant - defensive even - in arguing that the splatter film has (needs) no further justification or purpose. On a reflective level John McCarty defends the genre against the claims (here by Chicago moralizers Gene Siskel and Roger Ebert) that it is guilty of promoting a coherent ideology of misogyny:

> 'A film like Friday the Thirteenth, for example, is not guilty of expressing an anti-feminist viewpoint, for it has no viewpoint at all. It's not about anything. Friday exists mainly as a showcase for its grisly and astonishing special effects. And that it contains so many varied effects is precisely why splatter fans were drawn to it in such large numbers...One must remember, splatter movies by their very nature are eclectic. Often there isn't a new idea or plot device in them, for creativity is usually reserved for the special effects alone.'[29]

If the more glossy journals like Fangoria exhibit a modestly obsessive interest in the subject, there are also those prepared to

confess an unadulterated love of the most explicit and gruesome elements of the genre. This can be found in a range of cheap and hastily produced broadsheets and pamphlets which might be seen as a kind of horror underground, welcoming the most disreputable examples of the field with open arms. Bill Landis' Sleazoid Express for example, which boasts 'complete coverage of trash, horror and exploitation films' is typical in its use of a deliberate self-mocking humour which accompanies a knowing celebration of material deemed elsewhere to be controversial, shocking or in poor taste. Speaking of I Spit on your Grave it declares: 'The film is indefensible...a characteristic endemic to some of the more interesting exploitation films'. A similar enterprise from New York, the Gore Gazette, expresses an identical attitude toward the same film in describing it as 'a debasing, repulsive (yet entertaining) example of cinematic sexploitation', and later speculating that:

> 'I Spit on your Grave might disappoint gore fans as, aside from a neat back-cleaving scene, the bloodletting is kept pretty much to a trickle, yet it is a must-see for sex-offenders, perverts and hard-core filth/ exploitation connoisseurs. I enjoyed it but I'm not real proud that I did.'[30]

These kinds of remark operate under the terms of a kind of double-think, where body horror is singled out as the main criteria of what is interesting, preferably within the realm of what might be considered bad taste, and then qualified in its significance for the reader/viewer by the use of camp or dis-ingenuously self-deprecating humour; the effect is of simultaneously isolating the object of fascination and then trivializing it or, perhaps more importantly,

the nature of the viewer's interest; 'I enjoyed it but I'm not real proud I did'. The humour provides distance whereby the interest in gore is rendered non-serious. Even in the most acute cases of gore worship there is seldom if ever any kind of testament to the desire to witness gore effects within the context of apparent or genuine protracted human suffering. It is one of the most important distinctions to be made between the reception of, say, nightly news footage of carnage and the horror film's present imagery. The horror film revels in bodily destruction as spectacle, but not a spectacle which necessarily derives its impact within the terms of a conventional realism. In fact, in my own experience there is a marked difference in the audience's reaction to gory material which is delivered within the aesthetic context of the horror film and that which - although it may be faked in similar fashion - is signified as real. Watching the reaction to the film Faces of Death (1981) - a film in the tradition of Mondo Cane (1961) - I saw young men covering their eyes and producing involuntary expressions of disgust at scenes of post-mortems and executions which in the context of a George Romero or Sean Cunningham film might well have produced laughter, cheering or sick jokes more in keeping with the account offered earlier by Britton or by Pauline Kael in her puzzled description of an American audience's irreverent exploitation of the gory scenes in Franju's Eyes without a Face (1959)[31] The fact that the effects used to construct some of the 'real' events in the former are decidedly inferior to much of the horror industry's current output fails to outweigh the reading context of their being presented as real events. Again then, the limited anatomical experience of the viewer is apparent and we must question the arguments which claim that the

development of splatter and related effects is one based on satisfying the demands for increasing verisimilitude.

Moving away from realist arguments, we may recap by affirming the centrality of the imagery of bodily destruction as it has been constructed by a number of popular discourses.

1) Through the development of and interest in special effect, whereby the construction/destruction of the body provides both a spectacular highlight in the films themselves and a source of 'para-generic' interest disseminated by and explored in a range of fanzines.

2) The fascination with splatter often transcends a concern with narrative innovativeness and plausibility often to the point at which it provides the film's novelty value and its greatest area of unpredictability.[x]

3) That the effects themselves must simultaneously be seen as incredible and <u>as</u> effects in order for them to be appreciated.

4) Audiences rely less on experience of human pathology than on aesthetic, especially generic, conventions to provide reading contexts in which they interpret such images, and they understand images of body horror as part of the generic terrain of the modern horror film.

In the light of these factors we need to find a positive way of understanding the significance of splatter. If we are to treat the

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[x]Unpredictable, that is, in its particulars; its appearance is, of course, mandatory.

horror film and its imagery in the way we might treat any other aspect of popular cinema, then we must regard the destruction of the body as a ritual with possible symbolic functions, as significant as it is disturbing. There are several important ways in which the horror film's particular representations of the body suggest relationships with certain modes of conceptualizing contemporary perceptions of subjectivity. First of all, we can proceed by considering some general propositions about the body's potential as a complex signifier of socially-determined meanings.

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10 Briefly, this involved the successful completion of an anti-trust case against Paramount studios which, among other things, saw the end of the oligopolic hold of the major studios on the exhibition and distribution aspects of the industry. In assaulting their economic security founded around this, the decision opened up the market for independents and created a position from which the stylistic dominance of the majors could be challenged. For further reading on the case (completed in 1947), see Michael Conant, The Impact of the Paramount Decrees, in Tino Balio, op.cit., pp.346-370.

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26 Kobena Mercer, Monster Metaphors : Notes on the Making of Michael Jackson's Thriller, Screen, Vol.27, No.1, January/February 1986, pp.26-43.

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28 Andrew Britton, op.cit., pp.2-3.

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31 Pauline Kael's following account is a perfect instance of audiences' ability to use a film for their own readings, rather than being constrained by the text's 'preferred' reading: 'I had gone to see a famous French film, George Franju's Eyes without a Face, which had arrived in /America/ in a dubbed version called The Horror Chamber of Dr Faustus...The theatre, which holds 2,646, was so crowded that I had trouble finding a seat.

Eyes without a Face, which Franju called a 'poetic fantasy', is austere and elegant...It's a symbolist attack on science and the ethics of medicine. But the audience seemed to be reacting to a different movie. They were so noisy the dialogue was inaudible; they talked until the screen gave promise to bloody ghastliness. Then the chatter subsided to rise again in noisy approval of the gory scenes. When a girl in the film seemed about to be mutilated, a young man behind me jumped up and down and shouted encouragement...But nobody seemed to care what the movie was about or be interested in the logic of the plot - the reasons for the gore.'
(From, I Lost it at the Movies and quoted in J. Hills is Alive: A Defence of 'I Spit on your Grave', Marco Starr, in The Video Nasties, London, Pluto, 1984, p.53.

CHAPTER THREE

THE BODY AS A SOCIAL SYMBOL

The Body and Hollywood Cinema

The human figure has occupied a central place in pictorial art since its origins. But, if certain kinds of representation can be brought to mind which are unexceptionable in their exclusion of the human presence, it can be confidently asserted that mainstream or Hollywood-style cinema cannot exist without them. Without the presence of bodies - as heroes, crowds, corpses, whatever - the Hollywood film is inconceivable. In fact, with the exception of certain documentary and avant-garde instances, narrative cinema is always organized around the image and presence of the human body. The obviousness of the body's importance to cinematic story-telling has, ironically, resulted in its being taken more or less for granted until the present where we find its significance taken into account in relation to two substantial theoretical projects, both offering accounts contributing to our understanding of questions of cinematic identification.

First of all, there is the body of semiotic and psycho-analytical work which reads Hollywood-style narrative as the systematic modulation of a limited range of codes organized in a fashion which guarantees the maintainance of a coherent sense of

subjectivity for the viewer. Discussed at great length in several important and recent works,[1] this view sees Hollywood cinema as one which: '[C]onstitutes the subordination of cinematic time and space to a narrative logic that prioritizes, through the process of its own effacement, a character-centred, goal-orientated form of causality'.[2] This 'subordination of time and space', effected largely by a co-ordination of looks of the camera, the audience and the protagonist (usually male),[3] constructs the sense of a continual, 'whole' presence/subject in the film serving as a point of intelligibility for the viewer whereby the sight of the body of the protagonist - partial or whole - affords a continual confirmation of that presence. Hollywood cinema, then, becomes a system for controlling the appearance (both how and when it appears), becomes, in Stephen Heath's words, 'the machine of a certain presence, the institution of certain conditions of the body.'[4]

The body has, for most of the writers undertaking an explanation of this kind of textual system, figured largely in relation to questions of sexuality raised by the application of psycho-analytically-derived methods. Seen as part of an economy of desire and anxiety organized by the text, the body has received greatest attention from feminist critics focusing upon the special relation between objectified images of the female body and the look of the male protagonist/spectator.[5] As the postulated site of potential anxiety for the implicitly masculine spectator the female body is either eroticized or punished in an attempt to regulate feelings of unease. In this latter case, the violence meted out to the female body in the horror film is always understood as being generated by factors of a

sexual nature. For this kind of analysis the image of the body of the hero occupies a central function in confirming the film's construction of a male-gendered subject:

> 'With the emergence of the star system at the point of the elaboration and stabilization of novelistic modes of cinematic narration, the body, in Hollywood, became simultaneously the incarnation of the coherence of fictional characterization and the nodal site of a fetishistic regime of eroticization and sexual representation. Together with a reticence of gesture and (later) vocal delivery, these features came definitively to mark the representation of the body in Hollywood films'.
> (S. Neale:Art Cinema as Institution)[6]

The question of narrative function - as initiated in the work of Vladimir Propp[7] - has come to dominate much of the discussion in this area as is evidenced by Stephen Heath's attempt to categorize the instances of human presence in the cinema:

> 'Films are full of people, but what is this 'fullness' of people in films. The regime of the film as cinema is the narrative fiction film in relation to which the presence of people can be broken down analytically into the following instances or categories:
> ...character - An agent of a series of narrative predicates more or less individualized in relation and in addition to their accomplishment...
> ...person - The individual ('person' as the dictionary's 'the living body of a human being') who actualizes - is

> the support for, plays, represents - agent and character...
>
> ...image - The person, the body, in its conversion into the luminous sense of its film presence, its cinema. The high point of the image is the star...
>
> ...figure - The circulation between agent, character, person and image, none of which is able simply and uniquely to contain, to settle that circulation, the figure it makes in the film'.
>
> (Body, Voice)[8]

While Heath extends his consideration of the body to areas not simply reducible to matters of text - stars for instance - there remains a sense of priority in the latter due to a lack of attention to the full process by which phenomena such as stars are constructed outside of the film texts themselves via gossip, publicity material, fan clubs, interviews, biographies, newspaper articles etc.

It is the phenomenon of film stardom which is the site of the second major theoretical project bearing on questions of the cinematic treatment of the body. The most illuminating work in this area has been done by Richard Dyer whose deconstructions of this mystified terrain have exposed the main signifying processes involved. Dyer has, among other things, examined stars as images, where image is taken to be 'a configuration of visual, verbal and aural signs' and where it may be contributing to the general image or a particular image of stardom.[9] The body is understood as one of the more significant categories where this becomes apparent. In a recent book,

Heavenly Bodies, the body is considered as a crucial factor in the star images of Monroe, Robeson and Garland. Dyer proposes these bodies as being determined, in their possible significances, by socially-constructed ideas of what the body is or means. This involves readings of the body not just in terms of sexuality - as is inevitably the case with Monroe - but in relation to ideas of ethnicity, work, leisure, or entertainment. The body of Robeson signifying black nobility for example, or the body of the later Garland as the index of her drug abuse and the corporal sign of the dark side of the star system itself. The issue of cinematic use of the body is therefore opened out to include broader, socially-defined ways of perceiving it. Too often the discussion has been influenced by the cinema's own insistence upon the personal and the individual; Heath's category of the person subsuming broader questions of the body in general under the functional imperatives of agency and character.[x] Dyer takes the star phenomenon as an instance where that individualization has influenced readings of star bodies in terms of the natural and authentic experience, but then places these as part of a wider cultural frame of reference:

> 'Not only are Monroe, Robeson, Garland stars who are thought to be genuine, who reveal their inner selves, but the final touchstone of that genuineness is the human body itself. Stars not only bespeak our society's investment in the private as the real, but also often tell us how the private is understood to be the recovery of the natural 'given' of human life, our bodies. Yet...

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[x] Heath himself openly admits to this particular problem in the same article, although his probable area of further exploration would appear to be 'moments, intensities outside a constant simple unity of the body' discussed largely in terms of fetishism. (Body, Voice p.183)

> what we actually come up against at this point is far from straightforwardly natural; it is particular, and even rather peculiar, ways of making sense of the body. The very notions of sexuality and race, so apparently rooted in the body, are historically and culturally specific ideas about the body, and it is these that Monroe and Robeson, especially, enact, thereby further endowing them with authenticity'.[10]

What needs to be developed for an understanding of the horror film in its present condition, is an approach which draws upon both the foregoing kinds of argument; we must take into consideration the role the body plays in the construction of the subject, but at the same time we need to extend the significance of its particular construction in the horror text beyond sexuality to take a look at other areas of meaning. Dyer has written elsewhere that 'Society isn't one thing and the human body another. Society is the organization of the human body, how we experience our bodies and what we do with them'.[11] It is this interplay which we need to examine. We must be aware of the extent to which the ideas we have concerning our bodies are developed through historically specific channels, through media images, myths, linguistic formations and structures; in short, occur within the domains (form part) of particular discursive movements such as individualism, rationalism or philosophical materialism. Yet, at the same time we need to guard against lapsing into the idea that this is a purely linguistic or arbitrary phenomenon. If our bodies are understood by way of socially-contextualized and linguistically-organized systems of ideas and associations, they are also, to some

considerable extent, fixed in their possibilities. Unable to be constructed to mean simply anything at all, they are, in their specific and unchanging formal and material properties more suited to the construction of some ideas than others and inevitably suggestive of certain ineluctable conditions of our existence.

So far, it is sexuality which has dominated the field of discussion, but there are other, less pleasing, but equally certain consequences of our physical nature which need exploring beyond the common-sensical level at which they are often introduced into debates about the horrific. To do this, we can pursue the implications of the body's formal qualities as a symbol and then expand by accounting for contemporary attitudes towards its physical constitution, in each case tracing connections to the horror film's increasing obsession with the body and its destruction.

The Body as a Social Symbol

In Purity and Danger, the social anthropologist Mary Douglas takes issue with explanations of purification/pollution rituals that seek to place them as some sort of manifestation of an intuitive medical sense, that '[I]f we only knew all the circumstances we would find the rational basis of primitive ritual amply justified'.[12] Through a systematic examination of Judaic and Hindu ritual Douglas uncovers a set of relationships which articulate an understanding, not of medicine, but of social structure. Sarcastically refuting this 'medical materialism' she observes that,

> 'Even if some of Moses' dietary rules were hygeinically beneficial it is a pity to treat him as an enlightened public health administrator, rather than as a spiritual leader'.[13]

It is, then, the symbolic value of these rituals as they correlate bodily and social relationships that ultimately interests Douglas.

Asserting that a society devoid of symbolic acts to affirm its relationships is an impossibility she goes on to clarify the nature of the human body's capacity to function as a 'diagram of a social situation':

> 'The idea of society is a powerful image. It is potent in its own right to control or to stir men to action. This image has form; it has external boundaries, margins, internal structure. Its outlines contain power to reward conformity and repulse attack. There is energy in its margins and unstructured areas. For symbols of society any human experience of structures, margins or boundaries is ready to hand...No experience is too lowly to be taken up in ritual and given a lofty meaning. The more personal and intimate the source of ritual symbolism, the more telling its message. The more the symbol is drawn from the common fund of human experience the more wide and certain its reception'.[14]

The most common and shared complex symbol available is, of course, the human body.

> 'The body is a model which can stand for any bounded system. Its boundaries can represent any boundaries which are threatened or precarious. The body is a complex structure. The functions of its different parts and their relation afford a source of symbold for other complex structures. We cannot possibly interpret rituals concerning excreta, breast milk, saliva and the rest

> unless we are prepared to see in the body a symbol of society, and to see the dangers credited to social structure reproduced in small on the human body'.[15]

Polemically, this acts as a corrective to psychologically-reductive analyses of cultural phenomena which, in reverse order, theorize social structures as the projections of personal psychology:

> 'The sociologists have a duty of meeting one kind of reductionism with their own. Just as it is true that everything symbolizes the body, so it is equally true (and all the more so for that reason) that the body symbolizes everything else'.[16]

The body is, to Douglas's mind a 'natural symbol', the semic possibilities of which are anything but infinite:

> 'The physical body can have universal meaning only as a system that responds to the social system, expressing it as a system. What it symbolizes naturally is the relation of parts of an organism to the whole. Natural symbols can express the relation of an individual to his society at that general systemic level'.[17]

Against Levy-Bruhl, Douglas explains the primitive world-view as pre-Copernican rather than pre-logical. This is to say that the thought processes of the primitive are not essentially different from our own, merely trying to articulate a different type of social experience which necessarily entails a different conceptual apparatus being employed. The fundamental difference between the primitive world-view and our own is the 'Kantian principle that thought can

only advance by freeing itself from the shackles of its own subjective conditions'. Citing Paul Radin's study of the Trickster Myth of the North American Winnebago Indians, Douglas exemplifies her point. Two instances are given with Trickster interrogating, fighting or punishing parts of his own body, arms, anus etc. He appears at times with his body in physical disarray; intestines are wrapped around him and so on. The crucial point is, for Douglas, contained in the following remarks:

> 'Trickster begins, isolated, amoral and unselfconscious, clumsy, ineffectual, an animal-like buffoon. Various episodes prune down and place more correctly his bodily organs so that he ends by looking like a man. At the same time he begins to have a more consistent set of social relations and to learn hard lessons about his physical environment. In one important episode he mistakes a tree for a man and responds to it as he would to a person until eventually he discovers it is a mere inanimate thing. So gradually he learns the functions and limits of his being'.[18]

From here the crucial argument is developed (and forms the basis of her later work Natural Symbols) that rituals corresponding to an image of integrity in the body have a correlative in the social structure of the culture in which they are produced. That

> '[B]odily control is an expression of social control - abandonment of bodily control in ritual responds to the requirements of a social experience which is being expressed'.[19]

The work undertaken by Douglas is conducted largely with reference to tribal ritual in primitive cultures, yet she also extends it to the contemporary western culture. If ritual is understood to be, in Douglas's words, the 'heightened appreciation of symbolic action', then the experience of the cinema offers a suggestive parallel in the relatively unchanging habits of its consumption. One of the earliest and most idiosyncratic works to champion the 'folk art' of Hollywood is Parker Tyler's Magic and Myth of the Movies who dwells on the symbolic and ritual aspects of the movies. His preface to the American edition explicitly compares camera trickery to magic, speaking of the 'movie-theatre rite'.[20]

'We might add to this the highly conventionalized range of familiar ingredients; stars, character-types, plots, generic categories etc., experimentation with or contradiction of which frequently invoke a disproportionately hostile response from the audience. The horror genre is, more than most, orientated towards the eliciting of feelings and responses anticipated well in advance - shock, revulsion, shivers, morbid fascination and so on - and its audience can be seen and heard to respond in a common fashion with a shared fund of highly demonstrative gasps and gestures.

Bearing in mind Douglas's thesis about the significance of body symbolism, we can begin to explore its relevance to the body-obsessed world of the modern horror film, commencing with some preliminary considerations of the way the body/society image correlation has occupied a constant position in fiction generally.

> 'For a hundred years or more the world, our world, has been dying. And not one man, in these last hundred years or so, has been crazy enough to put a bomb up the asshole of creation and set it off. The world is rotting away, dying piecemeal. But it needs the coup de grâce, it needs to be blown to smithereens'.[21]

So wrote Henry Miller in his 1934 Tropic of Cancer. One of the 'lost generation' of alienated post-war writers, Miller articulates his carcinomatous world-view through a catalogue of those bodily features conventionally concealed or ignored. Miller's rejection of the world, or rather the particular culture he despises, is typified in the above anal characterization. Even more striking is this later description which compares a squalid view of Paris to one of New York:

> 'On a Sunday afternoon, when the shutters are down and the proletariat possesses the street in a kind of dumb torpor, there are certain thoroughfares which remind one of nothing less than a big chancrous cock laid open longitudinally. And it is just these highways, the Rue St Denis, for instance, or the Faubourg du Temple - - which attract one irresistably, much as in the old days, around Union Square or the upper reaches of the Bowery, one was drawn to the dime museums where in the show windows there were displayed wax reproductions of various organs of the body eaten away by syphilis and other venereal diseases. The city sprouts like a huge organism diseased in every part, the beautiful thoroughfares only a little less repulsive because they have been drained of their pus'.[22]

One could go on and on as Miller creates a world in the image of the bodily taboo: rotting buildings in an 'intestinal embrace', arterial passageways the colour of 'dried blood'. Everywhere the opportunity is taken to characterize individuals in terms of bad smells, pissing and shitting, dandruff and false teeth. There could hardly be a more graphic illustration of the simultaneous articulation of social and physical alienation, thus we understand the pun of Miller's title; society as cancerous - rotting society in the image of the rotting body and vice versa.

Tropic of Cancer is hardly the collectively-formed product of a naïve culture as might be some of Douglas's primitive avoidance and purification rituals; is is a work deliberately structured under the scrutiny of a particular and self-conscious artist. Yet in its reception, in its capacity to evince a deep and readily-understood sense of revulsion, the imagery employed is effective, and it is so, to the extent that the conventions employed enjoy a widespread and potent cultural currency which is far in excess of Miller's authorial 'world-view'.

Almost two-hundred years earlier, Swift's Gulliver encountered a variety of physical variations upon the human norms of scale and shape in order to create a fundamental 'alienation effect' through which a profound social satire is constructed. Travesties in the body politic are carefully and correspondingly orchestrated via imagery of the body physical. Kathleen Williams writes of the Lilliputians:

'[S]lowly the pettiness of these little men is

> revealed to us. They are brave - they have to be - and they are well organized; they work competently and quickly as a team. But like a body of ants or bees, they put the survival of their tiny state above everything else. They are very much what man is said to be, a "political animal", and it is this aspect of human life chiefly that they reveal to us. Their physical smallness is a symbol of the moral smallness of man...The emptiness of public grandeur is made clearer to us in a man six inches high than it can be in a man of six feet'.[23]

Similarly Swift's material, his contention that 'man is a physical as well as mental and spiritual being' (Williams), is constructed in the awesome physicality of the Brobdingnagians. In Laputa, the inhabitants:

> '[H]ave one eye turned in upon their own mental calculations and one turned up to the sky, for their principal interests are the abstract sciences of mathematics, music and astronomy. Not one eye is turned outward upon the world; their distorted human shape is emblematic of the Laputans' loss of their normal human quality in their absorption in abstract matters far from the daily concerns of men'.[24]

The continued vitality and success of Swift's novel lies in its quite sophisticated use of the basic principle elaborated by Douglas and the ideas which are developed through the use of scalar distortion or exaggeration are equally to be found in the popular cinema.

Jack Arnold's film The Incredible Shrinking Man (1957) is one of the most respected of the horror/science fiction cycle of the nineteen fifties. The hero, Scott Carey (Grant Williams), progressively shrinks in a kind of bodily diminuendo to the point where he transcends the recognizable world altogether and emerges in the sub-atomic infinity. This, Swiftian, process is described by Vivian Sobchack as, visually: '[A] transformation of the absolutely familiar into the absolutely alien'.[25] Sobchack is, however, placing the film's operations as part of a project in genre criticism, and sees it in general neo-formalist terms of aesthetic estrangement. We are then left wanting for an understanding of the cultural significance of its central theme. In keeping with our propositions about the social significance of body imagery, further analysis reveals the film's attempt to articulate the fears which co-existed with the material well-being of 'fifties' America - in particular a male-centred anxiety focused on a fear of diminishing potency. This is what emerges in the film's representation of the domestic sphere; home, household appliances, pets...as an increasingly hostile and life-threatening world and why the film's climax involves a triumphant return to the wild as the hero, now dressed in scraps evocative of a caveman and wielding a pin as a sword, defeats a spider in a battle for survival. The world of the film's cellar becomes a new frontier where traditional male values may be reasserted. Significantly, the spider is specifically a black widow enabling the combat/triumph to be understood in the light of re-asserted masculinity.

Richard Matheson's original novel, The Shrinking Man, published

in 1956, clearly places the diminishing size of the hero within the context of a feared inadequacy to maintain the role of provider in the modern world and the apparent benefits of the increasingly complex post-war society assume a kind of mocking intransigence as the relevance of their material offerings recedes:

> 'He was thinking about his application for life assurance. It had been part of the plan in coming East. First, working for his brother, then applying for a G.I. loan with the idea of becoming a partner in Marty's business. Acquiring life and medical insurance, a bank account, a decent car, clothes, eventually a house. Building a structure of security around himself and his family.
>
> Now this, disrupting the plan. Threatening to destroy it altogether. He didn't know at what precise second the question came to him. But suddenly it was terribly there and he was staring fixedly at his unheld, spread-fingered hands, his heart throbbing and swollen in an icy trap.
>
> How long could he go on shrinking?'[26]

Class and racial alienation rather than sexual alienation is articulated in the apparently non-corporeal status of Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man (1952). Sitting in his hideout surrounded by 1,369 light bulbs - the electricity for which he is stealing from 'Monopolated Light and Power' - the eponymous hero states his dilemma for the reader's benefit:

> 'I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allen Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood-movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fibre and liquids - and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. Like the bodiless heads you see sometimes in circus sideshows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass. When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination - indeed, everything and anything except me'.[27]

Here, the individual's lack of social power is registered by the body's visual non-presence; the facts of his material existence and of his social non-recognition fail to find a rational point of connection - ergo he must be invisible.

The foregoing examples illustrate a fairly straightforward use of the body's physical properties - physiology/anatomy, scale, presence - to articulate a perceived sense of the writer's relation to their society. The body, or rather its determinate imagery, is operating as a 'natural symbol' in the manner described by Douglas. Following these remarks we might move on to the modern horror film's preoccupation with bodily breakdown or disintegrity.

The Body in the Contemporary Zombie Film

One variant of the horror field which may serve as a useful introduction is the zombie film. Virtually redefined by the

contribution of George A. Romero, the zombie film is an important part of the genre's apocalyptic phase which developed throughout the 1970's.[x] The first zombie picture to be considered as such is Victor Halperin's White Zombie (1932), but the film perhaps shares more of its main subject with preceding hypnotic trance-based movies like Maurice Tourneur's Trilby (1915) or The Cabinet of Dr Caligari (1919) than with the genre's current manifestations. The early zombie films, of which I Walked with a Zombie (Jacques Tourneur:1943) is by far the most complex and mature work, share a range of themes and representations which no longer prevail in the field. The treatment of the zombies - their current image and mythology - appears to have undergone a re-working indicative of a substantially different world-view. Following the pattern established in Douglas's writings, the zombies - in their present mutilated and physically degenerated condition - appear to have accommodated the demand for a convenient and graphic image that may be taken as representative of the social order in which they are found. Social decay is mirrored by physical decay in a manner which is most directly observable in the self-consciously allegorical works of George Romero's zombie trilogy: Night of the Living Dead:1968, Zombies : Dawn of the Dead:1979 and Day of the Dead:1986. We may usefully compare these films with the earlier efforts of White Zombie and I Walked with a Zombie in order to clarify the issues.

Crucial to the early examples is the establishment of settings which are recognizably alien from a western point of view. Haiti and

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[x]Other major contributors were the 'Devil-Child' cycle and the 'Revenge of Nature' films, promising total annihilation from metaphysical or natural forces beyond control.

St. Sebastian serve to maintain a sense of distance from White civilization. What happens in the films may be understood as partly the result of this remove; the powerlessness which threatens the characters is emphasized by the precarious grip the whites have on the foreign culture and is suggested constantly by the imagery of the tropical world, the plantation, and so on. The best instance of this is the systematic assault on the senses of the white women (and the audience) on their walk to the home-fort in I Walked with a Zombie where a progression of images - sugar canes, the sound of the wind, animal skulls and corpses, whistling gourds, the negro zombie, Carrefour and the climactic Voodoo ceremony - function to chart a movement into totally alien circumstances. The threat to white culture comes from without; the world of the primitive, the irrational and the exotic which enables the development of the 'theme of "clean, decent-thinking" North Americans impinged upon by disturbing outside forces'.[28]

Doubts raised about the values of white civilization remain implicit or become ameliorated by their projection onto the 'other' of the films' black culture. In both films there is a perceived fear of patriarchal loss of control. In White Zombie it is through the white hero (John Harron)'s losing his bride to a rival who engages the zombie master (Bela Lugosi) to put her in a zombie trance, in I Walked with a Zombie a plantation owner meets a similar fate, it is suggested, as a consequence of her infidelity with his brother. In each case, the institution of patriarchal, heterosexual control is reinstituted at the end of the film [illegible] by the reformation and formation, respectively, of the romantic couple.

Consequently, black culture is exploited in its traditional, imagined relation to white culture, as the repository of primitive and repressed impulses of which the release of libidinal instincts figures most prominently. The films' treatment of sexuality allows black culture to function as the monstrous image of sexuality[x] as conforming to Robin Wood's notion of the horror film's essential structure.

> White/Black, Culture/Nature, Medicine/Magic, Sexual Repression/Sexual Release and so on. The consequence is that the threat to white culture, its institutions and structures, is minimal and reduced to the distant and idiosyncratic, the alien and the magical. The wider sense of white culture remains largely unexplored and intact; the primary power relations of the romantic couple are ultimately re-asserted.
>
> The representation of the zombies in these films serves to fulfil or reinforce these pre-occupations and displacements. If they are the walking dead, they are dead in spirit rather than in the flesh, for their bodies are relatively untouched by signs of genuine morbidity.

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[x] This is pursued in an interesting and oblique manner by the debate conducted in the film as to whether the cause is supernatural or pathological. The medical/rational side of the argument is advanced by the family doctor who characterizes a disease on two separate occasions as follows: i) 'you might say that portions of the spinal cord were burned out by this fever.' and ii) 'a fever with a long Latin name and a bad reputation for its after-effects, usually some form of insanity.' The specificity of the definition of the disease suggests to me a deliberate attempt to allude to syphilis. Syphilis involves the spirochaetal degeneration of brain and spinal material and, when untreated, may lead to a tertiary phase entailing insanity and paralysis. In particular, a rigidity in walking may be experienced. Known as locomotor ataxia, this may be the 'long Latin name' the script wishes to invoke.

> The notion of control or manipulation is of vital importance to the films of the early period, its absence being equally crucial to their latterday counterparts. In particular, there is the problem of controlling the fundamental sexual power relations of patriarchy. In both films, it is an image of passivity which the white zombies conform to, tantalizingly suggestive of their status in white culture, but actually a precondition of their genuinely falling prey to the influence of black culture. Both white and black zombies are subject to manipulation, either literally - by supernatural forces - or metaphorically, as implicitly subject to the constraints and repressions of white society. Whichever case prevails, systems of belief are in operation - rationalism/science or religion/magic - upon which the respective societies base their cultural identities. These identities are, by and large, not subject to collapse in any form. Rather, the films involve competition or struggle between the two of their representatives. The zombies are physical images of passivity in relation to this. According to Carlos Clarens, they are effectively pawns: 'Neither good nor evil, the zombie is a neutral character, a mere instrument in some sinister hierarchical design'.[29]

The deathly whiteness of the female zombies is in clear distinction against the blackness of the male zombies, their beauty contrasted to ugliness in White Zombie and facial peculiarity in I Walked with a Zombie, weakness is contrasted with strength in a set of oppositions

which render them the specific representatives of their cultures, engaged in a struggle which is largely based on sexual power and control.

In particular, there is a sense of pale, white middle-class bodies of the women being threatened by powerful, black slaves. This is especially clear in the emphasizing of Carrefour, the black zombie in the later film. Far from indicating signs of death, he is in possession of an enviable physique, appearing with an exposed torso of exceptional height and musculature. This forms part of the disturbing encounters of the trip to the home-fort when the women discover him; his physical features are revealed and highlighted by a torch. If the zombies of these films are physically indicative of conflicting social impulses, so, too, are the living dead of the Romero trilogy.

There are few films in which the human figure has been more graphically subjected to corruption, disfigurement and general insult. The inventiveness and awfulness of the appearance and behaviour of the zombies in Romero's work (achieved mostly by effects man Tom Savini) is a large part of their popular appeal. In the quite persistently allegorical context of the films they become, in every way, a morbid representation of the disintegrating social values and institutions experienced by the protagonists.

A first important development is the establishment of the films' events (and we may consider the trilogy as a progression within the same diegetic world even if there is no clear statement to this

effect, since Romero makes innumerable references of a directly inter-textual nature[x] within the context of American or western society. All the films are set in the United States, the only exception to which is the final scene of Day of the Dead which, in its portrayal of a tropical idyll, may be only the dying fantasy of the protagonist. (The film is unclear and ambiguous as to this brief image's reality status). Unlike the early zombie films, there is no attempt to divorce the significance of the monstrous from the films' presentation of daily reality. Denuded of supernatural and exotic backgrounds, the events of the narratives - their causes and effects - must be seen as a part of normality. In fact, as the scale of the disaster increases, the zombies become the norm with humanity reduced to small, embattled outposts of resistance.

The trilogy systematically attempts to present an apocalyptic world-view where the total collapse of western society appears inevitable. Each of the films develops this by focusing - as Robin Wood has shown - upon the 'structures and assumptions of patriarchal capitalism' in a specific way. The institutions of our society are exposed and attacked by the emphasis upon the family (Night), consumerism and the 'buddy' relationship (Dawn) and science and the military (Day). Compounding this is the refusal to provide any signs of cultural separateness between the humans and the zombies. The living dead appear as representatives from the whole spectrum of society and in Dawn, especially, we are given a complete range of

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[x]For instance, through continuity of character types - black protagonists, the developing, independent woman - or through thematically-charged icons like the helicopter, or the primary, siege settings of house, hypermarket and underground shelter complex.

classes, sexes, ages, races, religions and sub-cultures; part of the film's consistent humour, both slapstick and ironic, is derived from the hitherto neglected sight of monstrous visions of the everyday, of zombie businessmen, Hells Angels and Hare Krishna followers shuffling aimlessly around a giant hypermarket. This comparison of the monstrous with the protagonists is made explicit in Dawn where they are declared to be 'us' and are described as merely reiterating their former interests and behaviour patterns by hanging about in the shopping mall.

Geographically and culturally, then, the zombies - the ostensible 'other' are closely identified with the protagonists, or normality. Frequently, the behaviour of the central characters is irrational, callous or reprehensible enough to break the barriers based on notions of humanity. One thinks of the self-interest of the cowardly father-figure in Night or of Roger's enjoyment of the killing spree in Dawn, for instance. This is given a final ironic qualification in Day by the film's treatment of the zombie Bub. Trained by the scientist 'Frankenstein' Logan, the creature reveals a capacity for conditioning and ultimately emotion which the film plainly suggests as putting Bub on a superior plane of humanity to some of the military figures. The distinction of humanity itself is finally attacked.

Secondly, if the events of the films are relevant to western society today, they are also indicated to be virtually hopeless. The capacity to act collectively is undermined not only by the conflict between the protagonists due to their adherence to existing social relations, but also by the widespread collapse of systems of transport

and communication which leads to the recurring siege situations. This sense of breakdown accumulates in the trilogy with the final film commencing with an introduction to a deserted city populated by marauding zombies. One major distinction to be made between the two periods of zombie films can be understood in relation to this apocalyptic sense of catastrophe and hopelessness. In the early films, the numbers of the zombies are highly restricted or solitary. In Romero's films, they are, even by the end of the first film, large in number. Frequently, they are shown as almost unstoppable crowds or masses. This is part of the trilogy's constant imagery of lost control. Unlike the manipulated zombies of the Voodoo films, the zombies of the present are autonomous: ungoverned by human masters, they proceed on a course charted by instinct, notably the desire to consume human flesh. Consequently, in order that the zombies more adequately express a sense of rapidly-developing social breakdown, the mythology has been modified to incorporate both contagion and cannibalism. This enables a simultaneous image of accumulating power (of the monstrous) and dwindling human assets. Finally, the already minimal noises concerning origins of, and solutions to, the zombie problem are either dropped (such as the meteorite idea in Night) or led into negative areas (such as the conditioning of Bub within the terms of violent patriarchy; he is named after Frankenstein's father and his military training is re-awakened).

Body imagery in this dystopian vision corresponds to a picture of physical breakdown. As is suggested by the work of Douglas, social disintegration and ineffectuality is mirrored by bodily destruction and loss of control. In Douglas's view 'the more value people set on

social constraints, the more the value they set on symbols of bodily control.

> 'This is to say that in a society which has achieved a state of great complexity in its codes of behaviour and inter-relationships there will be a concomitant sense of bodily order or regulation. This is especially true of the more firmly established groups or classes, for instance, within a society such as our own. According to the rule of distance from physiological origin (or the purity rule) the more the social situation exerts pressure on persons involved in it, the more the social demand for conformity tends to be expressed by a demand for physical control. Bodily processes are more ignored and more firmly set outside the social discourse, the more the latter is important. A natural way of investing a social situation with dignity is to hide organic processes. Thus social distance tends to be expressed in distance from physiological origins and vice versa'.[30]

Nowhere is this more in evidence than in the lower or aspiring middle-class's fanatical aversion to the contemplation of bodily functions and where the desire to conform (in order to be accepted) is acute. Sexual or toilet matters especially are avoided or rendered benign by the use of euphemism and concealment (The use of decorative covers for spare lavatory paper springs to mind as one of the more familiar examples). Such affairs are frequently considered 'dirty', yet the sense of what may constitute dirt extends to more than that which may be toxic, harmful or contaminating, ranging from ordinary

soil to our own body fluids. Rather it is understood in its capacity to evoke feelings of disorder; 'dirt', comments Freud, 'is a matter in the wrong place'.[31]

It is tempting, in this light, to view the visceral shocks of the horror film as an affront of this nature to the values of bourgeois society, an assault with a particular effectivity against the most rule-conscious elements of society. It is certainly the case that two clearly identifiable areas where the horror film is repeatedly successful are constituted by the working class and youth markets. The two being less dominated by bourgeois norms through class position and social immaturity. The combination of the two appears, in my own experience of the video trade, to be the most reliable audience for sensational horror. This in no way conflicts with the contentions advanced on behalf of the work of Romero by the likes of Robin Wood, since we should expect a suitably visceral response from a director self-consciously working towards a progressive critique of bourgeois social structures and values. If the 'other' of the horror film is that which is outside the values of bourgeois society, then its imagery may be expected to offer a similar challenge of physical disorder and incontinence. In Romero's trilogy there is a parallel escalation of social collapse and bodies being pulled to pieces. The separation of tissue becomes increasingly divorced from realist premises. Dawn includes scenes with flesh simply appearing to come away with an ease unlikely in real life. By Day we are given scenes where several characters are quite literally pulled into pieces. Significantly, the major examples of this, involving the tearing apart of torsoes, viscera etc. in an extended treatment, occur with those the film sets up as embodying some of the worst aspects of society's

dominant values; 'in Day, the grossness of the characters is answered, appropriately, by the grossness of their deaths'.[32] x

As the visceral side of the horror film has developed, there has been an increasing attention to less tidy forms of injury and to more mysterious bodily contents, wounds which are ragged rather than neat, splintered bones (as in the arm-wrestling scene from The Fly: 1986) and a frequent movement away from blood to less familiar liquids suggestive, in their viscosity and pallor, of mucus or perhaps semen or pus. Again, Douglas, drawing upon Sartre accounts for the revulsion engendered by these latter, sticky things in terms of their ability to question boundary states. Viscosity gives rise to ambiguity; neither solid nor liquid, stickiness is capable of generating feelings of unease about the subject's separation from the world and therefore its most basic sense of itself:

> 'Its (viscous material)...stickiness is a trap, it clings like a leech; it attacks the boundary between myself and it. Long columns falling off my fingers suggest my own substance flowing into the pool of stickiness. Plunging into water gives a different impression. I remain a solid, but to touch stickiness is to risk diluting myself into viscosity'.[33]

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x I should point out that Wood, here, specifically sees 'dismemberment and evisceration as the ultimate castration', which answers the patriarchal militarism of the film's most negative characters. I would wish to remain less narrow in understanding its implications, as my above remarks indicate, while not rejecting Wood's comment as explanatory of part of the significance of these images.

From this kind of suggestion it is possible to see the bearing that body imagery of a horrific nature might have on questions of subjectivity or identity. The foregoing consideration of Romero's films shows one way in which this is able to be exploited in a self-conscious manner; his films are dystopian allegories which knowingly construct a universe and its inhabitants in a way that favours symbolic resonance over questions of naturalistic plausibility. The zombie trilogy conforms in many ways to Frederick Jameson's specifications for romance, and his comment on its tendency to favour a 'heightened symbolic closure' recalls Douglas's basic definition of ritual as the 'heightened appreciation of symbolic action'.

Jameson's point of departure is the theory of Romance developed by Northrop Frye in his monumental Anatomy of Criticism in which the world, the twin protagonists and its semic organization are articulated through the imagery of nature in ultimate deference to the ethical binarism of good/evil. This idea is developed by Jameson who makes use of part of Heidegger's phenomenological methodology and which is deserving of substantial quotation here:

> 'Frye's assimilation of the "world" of romance to nature in its traditional acceptation conceals an interesting problem, which phenomenological accounts of this concept may help to dramatize. For phenomenology the technical term "world" designates the ultimate frame or "Gestalt", the overall organizational category or ultimate perceptual horizon, within which empirical, inner-worldly objects and phenomena are perceived and inner-worldly experience takes place; but in that case, "world", in its phenomenological sense, cannot normally be an object of

perception in its own right. This view is indeed confirmed by conventional narrative realism, where events take place within the infinite space of sheer Cartesian extension, of the quantification of the market system: a space which like that of film extends indefinitely beyond any particular momentary "still" or setting or larger vista or panorama, and is incapable of symbolic unification.

A first specification of romance would then be achieved if we could account for the way in which, in contrast to realism, its inner-worldly objects such as landscape or village, forest or mansion - mere stopping places on the lumbering coach or express-train itinerary of realistic representation - are somehow transformed into folds in space, into discontinuous pockets of homogeneous time and of heightened symbolic closure, such that they become tangible analoga or perceptual vehicles for "world" in its larger phenomenological sense. Heidegger's account goes on to supply the key to this enigma, and we may borrow his cumbersome formula to suggest that romance is precisely that form in which "worldness" of "world" reveals or manifests itself, in which, in other words, "world" in the technical sense of the transcendental horizon of our experience becomes visible in an inner-worldly sense'.[34]

Now there are strong romantic claims upon the horror genre in

general which have developed through the Gothic period of literature; Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights, the works of Poe etc., and the above characterization of worldness expressed in a kind of stylistic and narrative/thematic binarism is relevant to an analysis of many contemporary horror films. It is not often the case that mainstream film production, even in a 'fringe' genre is susceptible to manipulation or rejection of the temporal conventions of Hollywood: shot time as 'real', experimental time, ellipses and flash-forwards/backwards clearly signified etc., in the way that Jameson describes the 'discontinuous pockets of homogeneous time' (although Dario Argento's Suspiria does manage to achieve this to a certain extent). However, there is a persistent use of the 'inner-worldly objects'; landscapes, architecture as 'tangible analoga' for the expression of the various semic manifestations, the avatars of the informing dialogue: Good/Evil. Andrew Britton has written, interestingly, upon such imagery in a long article on the film Mandingo (Richard Fleischer:1975).[35] Quoting examples from a wide range of relevant texts (The Pioneers, The House of the Seven Gables, Benito Cereno, The Portrait of a Lady...), Britton refers to Leslie Fiedler's understanding of the American Gothic as 'the genre precisely devoted to laying bare the chaotic undertow of the New World consciousness' and explains how this consciousness (we might say worldness following Jameson) reveals itself in 'the image of an appalling mansion inhabited by a monstrous and perverted family' which is 'part of a central tradition in American art which uses the image of a building to express the conflicts in the American psyche'.[36] Although Jameson would not rest with the unproblematized use of psyche here (since he would wish to

'lay' this cultural entity as part of the dialectical critique of positivism he is mounting in his book) there seems to me to be a clear link here in the two projects between the Jameson/Heidegger model of 'worldness of world' (with some debt to Goldmann and Lukacs) and Britton's description of Falconhurst as 'a microcosm of America' at a time in which the American culture was reacting to Vietnam and Watergate with a failure of confidence in their traditional political process.

Numerous recent films sustain this phenomenon which has developed from the frequently artless (but nonetheless forceful) use of 'the old dark house' convention as the inevitable background for a ghost story to the heightened use exhibited in Psycho. In Death Trap (Tobe Hooper:1976) a nasty, the central location is a clapboard hotel 'set in EC's decaying swamp-land, peopled with degenerate cretins, crumbling broken-down shacks and hungry alligators'.[37] The studio set-piece is non-naturalistically lighted, often with mood-related reds and blues and is surrounded by an abundance of mist. In a pool behind and beneath the back porch is a huge alligator to whom are fed the victims of the hotel's deranged proprietor (played by Neville Brand). The almost fairy-tale quality of the film's world is highlighted by the climax of the film, picked up on by David Pirie in which 'the old man becomes a victim of his pet and only his artificial limb breaks the surface of the water in a neat and explicit reference to the legend of Captain Hook in Peter Pan'.[38] House and occupant are mutually informative, rotting institution and environment are united with rotting persona as architecture imposes its malevolent shape on the swampscape. Nazi flags, guns and a female shop dummy in the maniac's bedroom describes the mixture of

fascism, machismo and female objectification which Hooper traces as the sources of his disposition. The malaise is symptom of American patriarchy which the film develops in its range of specific references from the implications of using the brutal-featured ex-war hero Neville Brand to the Captain Hook hommage. The same strategy is used in Hooper's other films: Texas Chainsaw Massacre (1975), a backwoods home populated by a family of cannibalistic, ex-abbatoir workers, Funhouse, a homicidal human deformity lurks under the gimmicry of a carnival funhouse (ghost train) and Poltergeist (1982), where the influence of Spielberg's suburban romanticism is darkened considerably, most notably in the middle-class home's neo-Gothic lines and the legions of rising corpses in the finale. Similar usages occur in Carrie (Brian de Palma:1976) and The Shining (Stanley Kubrick:1980) the home as an image of the total society or part of it cast in monstrous terms. One of the more striking examples is the Romero trilogy with its highly controlled and restricted use of setting and character discussed earlier. During the film's central episodes, the location takes on the power of the romance setting in its articulation of the modern American world and its values. Further instances are legion in the use of what I am inclined to call 'Military-Industrial' or 'Corporate Gothic' in which the bare, impenetrable structures of modernist architectural design, the glassboxes of Mies van de Rohe, externalize the inscrutable and undemocratic manoueverings within. A rhetoric of post-war 'no-admittance' signs and non-answerability that proliferates in secret military installations and research institutions protects and announces the activities of the alienated and differentiated workforce who toil within, unaware of the implications of their

activities. Cronenberg's films abound with them; the Starliner complex in Shivers whose sterile environment contains the bored middle-classes that provide the object of Cronenberg animus (the apartment was actually Cronenberg's own home at the time), the dark profiles, in The Brood and Scanners, of the respective institutions conceal arcane psycho-somatic and psycho-kinetic goings-on. In the latter film the brightly-lit and characterless environs of the Con-Sec organization express the callousness of its operations, discussed at the beginning of the film in emotionless 'committee-speak' by its executives. These are the organizations that dramatize the concept of William H. Whyte's 'fifties 'Organization Man'; backbone of the 'Taylorized' practices of Eisenhower's 'military-industrial complex'.

To recapitulate and isolate the major features of our argument then:

a) Horror's Gothic-romantic tradition orchestrates human qualities and activities with a range of worldly imagery. We have examined the house or mansion etc., but one could treat the forest/woods in Transylvanian examples, the Mojave desert in 'fifties S.F. in like fashion.

b) The 'heightened symbolic closure' (Jameson) of this treatment is the manner in which 'worldness of world', the manifestation of our ultimate frame of worldly reference in phenomenological terms, appears in artistic form; macrocosm through microcosm in properly analogical fashion.

The movement of the latter process through the former, is, according to Jameson, the operation which defines romance: 'romance is precisely that form in which "worldness of "world" reveals or manifests itself...' Furthermore, he offers an elaboration on the status of the romantic character:

> 'The centrality of "worldness" in romance will now lead us to question the primacy Frye attributes to traditional categories of character - in particular, the role of the hero and villain - in romance. We suggest, on the contrary, that the strangely active and pulsating vitality of the "world" of romance, much like Stanislaw Lem's sentient ocean in Solaris, tends to absorb many of the act- and event-producing functions normally reserved for narrative "characters"; to use Kenneth Burke's dramatistic terminology, we might say that <u>in romance the category of Scene tends to capture and to appropriate the attributes of Agency and Act, making the "hero" over into something like a registering apparatus for transformed states of being</u>, sudden alterations of temperature, mysterious heightenings, local intensities, sudden drops in quality and alarming effluvia, in short, the whole semic range of transformation scenes whereby, in romance, higher and lower worlds struggle to overcome each other'.[39]
>
> (my emphasis. PB)

Thus romance is that genre which produces character as an effect of changes in its diegetic inner-worldliness. (One can see

clearly here the debt to recent theories of subjectivity in psychoanalysis, and the subsequent questioning of the status of the unified, knowing subject, and its adequacy as a point of reference in philosophy, sociology and the arts). As I have shown earlier, the horror film has, whatever its historical inflections and concessions, consistently demonstrated,a preoccupation with questions of identity. In one sense it has always been a paranoiacally constructed type of narrative in which the subject (frequently characterized as representative of our entire civilization) appears under attack from life/Nature/society-threatening forces. To this degree the genre's use of character is similar to the above definition for the romance. If we bear in mind Jameson's argument that scene or world tends to supervise character with regard to 'attributes of Agency and Act', then we might, recalling Stephen Heath's use of the category 'person' as the living body 'who actualizes - is the support, forplays, represents - agent and character', consider the inevitable significance of the physical body in this construction of the subject as a 'registering apparatus for transformed states of being'. Unlike most other genres, the threat of a horrific and crucially physically-destructive death has been an essential feature and we must contemplate this phenomenon as crucially bound up with the equally consistent address to questions of threatened subjectivity. While Romero's work displays a high degree of self-awareness, this kind of relationship is no less evident in many other, less self-conscious works.

Present developments in the field show a particular deployment of body imagery to articulate negative perceptions of the subject

in its relation to the world. This is a process that frequently involves the pervasive use of contemporary cultural discourses concerning death. In the following chapter we shall examine the body as an image of the subject under threat of death and out of control, with special reference to the image of cancer in the films of David Cronenberg.

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CHAPTER FOUR

METAPHORS OF DEATH AND DISEASE

Death and Secularism

The contribution of ideas of death to our sense of subjectivity is at the heart of the historian Philipe Ariès's massive work The Hour of Our Death.[1] Its main assumption is that 'there was a relationship between man's attitude towards death and his awareness of self, of his degree of existence or simply of his individuality.[2] Through a painstaking examination of attitudes, rituals, documents and artistic practices Ariès manages to order a sequence of distinct assumptions underlying the evolution of the culture of death in western society. These basic assumptions, regarding popularly held beliefs about the nature of life and death, body and soul, Heaven, Earth and Hell, correlate objectively in the changing social structure from the early middle ages to the present day. Initially, Ariès describes the 'Tame Death' exemplified in chansons de geste such as the Song of Roland. This acceptance of death characterized by grace and passivity has, according to Ariès, existed for about two thousand years, yet by the present day

> 'It has now been so obliterated from our culture that it is hard for us to imagine or understand it. The ancient attitude in which death is close and familiar and yet

> diminished and desensitized is too different from our own view, in which it is so terrifying that we no longer dare say its name'.[3]

What is charted by this shift is a movement in the individual's sense of social being from a place defined by the trans-individualistic categories of community function and necessity and the sense of the race's biological continuity, to an atomistic view of existence where we no longer see ourselves as part of an unbroken chain of humanity. From the eleventh to the seventeenth century there developed an 'exaltation of the individual' in which

> 'the traditional relationship between self and other was overthrown, and the sense of one's own identity 'prevailed over submission to the collective destiny. Everyone became separated from the community and the species by his growing awareness of himself. The individual insisted on assembling the molecules of his own biography, but only the spark of death enabled him to fuse them into a whole. A life thus unified acquired an autonomy that placed it apart; its relations with others and with society were transformed. Friends came to be possessed like objects, while inanimate objects were desired like living beings'.[4]

The pictorial efforts of the time reveal, in their graphic revelations of bodily decay, the awakened horror of the individual at the demise of their, now paramount, earthly existence. Co-eval with this is the spread of the popular belief in the separation of body and soul, where individual existential fears of physical mortality

are offset by a faith in the immortal soul. This 'Death of the Self' gives way, in the nineteenth century, to the 'Death of the Other'; fears of death are transferred from self to loved one. Within the new privacy of the family as the fundamental social unit the 'death of the self lost its meaning' in a restructuring of sensibility and affect that came to supplant both the earlier models of community and individual. The re-emergence of pathos with regard to matters of bereavement was then a symptom of this projection of fear onto the other in the form of the loved one or 'dear departed'. In the twentieth century this develops into a total avoidance of the appalling detail of death; its physical processes are disguised and lied about to spare the other from the painful truth. It is here that Ariès arrives at the 'Invisible Death' of modern man.

The mechanized and medicalized culture of late industrial society has witnessed an attempt to rationalize, to explain and thus defuse and conceal death. Hospitals combat or - in the event of failure - at least disguise and conceal death. Yet, ironically, just at the point where death approaches some kind of final demystification, all the horrors manage to recrystallize. The role played by medical science in consolidating the secularization of society contributes to its dual image as that which saves and that which also takes away since, as Ariès explains, societal shame at, and avoidance of death is a direct consequence of 'the definitive retreat of Evil'.

We have achieved what William Faulkner called a 'national religion of the entrails' whereby secularization has narrowed our interest down to problems of a temporal and material nature.

Questions of existence are reduced to biological rather than spiritual or metaphysical fundamentals. In the twentieth century the body reigns supreme in the West. The body of the self generally articulated in the body of the other is no longer the mere vehicle of earthly endeavours but the object of them. Mens sana in corpore sano gives way to 'you are what you eat'. Medical knowledge forewarns each and every one of us at the same time that it promises to improve or extend our lives; as it seeks to help us, it remains a constant reminder of our most fundamental limitation: mortality without a promise of the hereafter. The explanatory power of supernatural evil, of the warring transcendental forces of the past, has collapsed in the face of increased secularization; Heaven and Hell are waning images in their classical sense. But in a world which cannot find a socially orientated reconciliation with death, i.e. a point to a purely material existence which is not rendered meaningless by death, then Evil becomes translated into more mundane and physical terms. If we abandon metaphysics, we are nonetheless left with fear and anxiety, and the body is one area where these concerns find an expression. Materialism produces its own brand of Manicheanism where the disquiets of a secular world are exercised; where health and sickness, order and chaos compete for possession of the contemporary self which has been reduced, in large part, to its corporal horizons. Our culture has lately developed an obsession with the idea of physical fitness which suggests itself as the reverse side of body horror; the strenuous pursuit of diet and exercise as the key to a better existence and the source of a newly-developed fitness culture. This culture often appeals well beyond the bounds of those who practically engage with it, invading wider cultural phenomena such as the cinema. In

cinematic terms one might postulate the dance and achievement-orientated films like Fame (Alan Parker:1980)('I Want to Live Forever') and Flashdance (Adrian Lyne:1983) against the films of David Cronenberg; the dance energy and vital ambition of the one against the capitulation to disease and corrupted flesh of the other. Christopher Walken's wonderfully drained and terminal performance in The Dead Zone (David Cronenberg:1983) may stand as exemplary of the latter trend. The spectre of cancer looms large in opposition to physical discipline and body culture, aerobics, jogging and so on. The image of cancer runs throughout the present cycle of horror films, either explicitly, as in the work of Cronenberg or films like Forbidden World (Allan Holzman:1984) or implicitly represented in the numerous cases of uncontrollable tissue growth or incubi as can be found in Alien (Ridley Scott:1979), The Thing (1982) or The Falling (Deran Serafian:1985). What is common is a sense of disaster visited at the level of the body itself - an intimate apocalypse. The enduring image is of the body irreversibly self-destructing, by the actions of inscrutable cellular networks operating in accordance with their own incomprehensible schedules.

The modern strategies of combating death or of concealing it have failed to dispose of its horrors,

> 'it has allowed the old savagery to creep back under the mask of medical technology. The death of the patient in the hospital, covered with tubes, is becoming a popular image more terrifying that the transi or skeleton of macabre rhetoric. There seems to be a correlation between the "evacuation of death, the last refuge of evil, and the return of this same death, no longer tame. This should not

> surprise us. The belief in evil was necessary to the taming of death; the disappearance of the belief has restored death to its savage state"'.[5]

It is understandable, then, that in a society that has ceased to abide by the notion of extrinsic causes such as evil - in its supernatural understanding - and which cannot derive sufficient reassurance from an intrinsic and socially-legitimated conception of life and death, people will, as always, attempt to find other symbolic ways of negotiating the primary fear of death and its probable sign - disease. Hell, as Clive Barker has said, is 'reimagined by every generation' and the search for secular monsters continues. Even a philosophically-minded and erudite surgeon-writer like Richard Selzer, in seeking to invest the secularized body with poetic significance resorts, perhaps inevitably, to the language of conflict, with Death capitalized and transformed into a knowable, if unstoppable enemy:

> 'You do not die all at once. Some tissues live on for minutes, even hours, giving still their little cellular shrieks, molecular echoes of the agony of the whole corpus. Here and there a spray of nerves dances on. True the heart stops; the blood no longer courses; the electricity of the brain sputters, then shuts down. Death is now <u>pronounceable</u>. But there are outposts where clusters of cells yet shine, besieged, little lights blinking in the advancing darkness. Doomed soldiers, they battle on. Until Death has secured the premises all to itself'.[6]

Some of our more potent secular monsters are those which, in avoiding magical or supernatural mystification, and deriving from the

mundanities of daily life, are common experiences of misery with remedies believed to be outside society's potential. This lies at the heart of Susan Sontag's brief but brilliantly insightful account of the use of physical disease as a metaphor.[7] Her description of the above process is focused on the way that T.B. and cancer have functioned as the two great diseases of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries respectively. Popular images of the diseases are understood as:

> 'responses to a disease thought intractable and capricious - that is, a disease not understood - in an era in which medicine's central premise is that all diseases can be cured'.

The imagery of cancer and of the hospital process are two important areas of influence upon the general body horror of the contemporary cinema and we can go on to explore them in separate but related discussions, the former with specific reference to the films of David Cronenberg.

The Horrific Image of Cancer

> 'Everything...gives you cancer'. (words of a song by Joe Jackson)

With reference to Henry Miller's Tropic of Cancer we considered the diseased body as a kind of social metaphor. More precisely, Miller utilized the idea of cancer as a kind of master-image of a society he perceives to be losing its spiritual values. It also seems clear, from the work of Ariès, that atomizing and individualizing aspects of the changing social formation have contributed to a world-view which is secular and encourages a sense of material and physical rather than spiritual and transcendent existence. Turning to

Sontag's essay on cancer, we can begin to be more specific about the increasing use of carcinomous images.

Sontag's concern is to expose the treatment of disease in fiction and modern myth as indicative of contemporary modes of popular imagination. Tuberculosis and cancer are diagnosed as the representative afflictions of the last and the present centuries since they fulfil the necessary criteria for conversion into horrific or morbid fantasy. They have been used as 'punitive or sentimental fantasies' deeply symptomatic of their times. According to Sontag, the shift from T.B. to cancer as the central disease metaphor of their respective periods is connected to the particular phases of industrialization with which they coincide.

T.B., although quite plainly an ugly prospect in reality, nonetheless found itself transformed in nineteenth century fiction through the language of a 'romantic agony' by which it is systematically modified and refined. Eventually the wider pathology of the disease is diminished in favour of its being understood as a disease of the lungs only; a metaphor in Sontag's opinion for a 'disease of the soul'. Quoting extensively from an impressively diverse range of fictions she goes on to demonstrate that the disease has served to articulate - through the image of the resigned and sensitive victim who sadly wastes away - the revolt of the romantic sensibility in the face of burgeoning bourgeois culture and industrialism. A number of valuable insights are offered to explain the rise of the cancer myth to supplant that of T.B. and which point to structural consistencies in their application.

They are each responses to ascendent formations or models of capitalism; for Sontag:

> 'Early capitalism depends on the necessity of regulated spending, saving, accounting, discipline - an economy that depends on the rational limitation of desire. T.B. is described in images that sum up the negative behaviour of nineteenth century homo economicus; consumption; wasting; squandering of vitality. Advanced capitalism requires expansion, speculation, the creation of new needs (the problem of satisfaction and dissatisfaction); buying on credit; mobility - an economy that depends on the irrational indulgence of desire. Cancer is described in images that sum up the negative behaviour of twentieth century homo economicus: abnormal growth; repression of energy, that is, refusal to consume or spend'.[8]

This latter description of the contemporary cancer myth conforms to the model already advanced about the relation of body image to social structure, suggesting a double inflection; the disease's physical manifestation as an image of abnormal growth and its wasting effect on the personality as a figure for blocked desire. While the energy-dissipating notion of the disease is a fundamental one it its popular understanding, it is symptomatic of more than sexual repression or libidinal withdrawal and may be seen as part of the range of discursive strategies which typify negative perceptions of the contemporary subject. This involves a paranoid conception of the subject's relation to society with a diminished sense of the

capacity to act and determine the course of events. In this view, the reduction in personal energy is an image with broader implications of powerlessness than is suggested by the question of libido, extending to the political and frequently touching upon the subject's felt relation to technology. This in no way invalidates the basic thrust of Sontag's claim that it is capitalism's present phase which is generating these responses. However, we need to take into account certain other specifications of its present condition and may usefully draw upon the work of Frederick Jameson to do this. Before extending our analysis in this way, we can pursue the other aspects of the cancer image and mythology as part of the negative body imagery of the horror film.

The cancer image appears to be especially effective in the field of body horror since it fills the role of the secular, materialist monster so well. In particular, it is offered as the disease of materialist culture, of consumer indulgence. It is 'the horrible cancer of wealth' as Barthes puts it, which determines our modern existence for which we live in fear of a correspondingly physical retribution. Cancer is the disease par exellence for our purpose. We are left with an idea of cancer which,

> 'as a disease that can strike anywhere, is a disease of the body. Far from revealing anything spiritual, it reveals that the body is, all too woefully, just the body.
>
> Such fantasies flourish because T.B. and cancer are thought to be much more than diseases that usually are (or were) fatal. They are identified with death itself'.[9]

Cancerous imagery in the horror film is present in a variety of treatments, from the apparently naïve to the explicit acknowledgement of the disease. To begin with, there are numerous examples of films which have images and themes of uncheckable body growth. A common effects tour de force is the real-time metamorphosis or destruction of the body. Unlike many earlier examples of physical assault in the horror film - familiar separated limbs and eyes of the Hammer Film Frankenstein laboratory, for instance - the current vogue is heavily emphatic about the flesh itself. It is tissue in general which is focused on. On the one hand, it appears to have an independence, a will of its own in the unwanted excursions it takes. On the other, it differs from the removal of discrete and recognizable portions of the anatomy precisely in its refusal to be isolated and removed. It is ultimately a vision not of assault upon the body from without, but of the body itself out of control; a riot of matter.

The rebellion of our own body as an image of the monstrous appears to derive its effectivity in porportion to the centrality of the physical in contemporary notions of a non-transcendent individual identity. The particularities of the cancer myth allow its metaphorical use as a negative image of a purely material self being destroyed in/by a materialist society. Two of the more common strategies for characterizing this idea of society are the reference to consumerism as a way of life and the construction of images of science and technology as the ultimate sign of secular rationalism. The latter is especially effective when integrated with ideas of its relation to corporate capitalism or the state; Eisenhower's 'Military Industrial Complex' is exemplary.

Horror writer and film-maker Stephen King - who is clearly the most popular author in the field - has always displayed a fascination with the consumer lifestyle. His works are littered with references to specific brand names, real and imaginary. They appear as both the details of daily routine, 'Tad was in the other room watching The New Zoo Revue and eating a bowl of Twinkles. Twinkles was a Sharp cereal, and the Trentons got all their Sharp cereals free'.[10] or, more interestingly, as simile and metaphor to bind the characters ever more deeply into this world,

> 'Tad Trenton, four years old, lay in his bed, all wires and stiff Erector Set braces...But little by little the wires unsnarled themselves and stiff Erector Set muscles relaxed'.[11]

In Clive Barker's words, 'What he does is seal the moment, it's like a time-capsule of consumerism'.

Typically, the intrusion of the unpleasant or monstrous is pitched at the comfortable middle-classes whose endorsement of such a life-style is greatest; Cujo, Thinner, Christine, Pet Sematary, for example.

King frequently alludes to cancer in his work and nowhere is the fear more succinctly introduced than in Thinner (written under the pseudonym of Richard Bachman). The basic storyline involves Billy Halleck, a middle-aged lawyer,who accidentally runs down and kills an old gypsy woman. Cursed by her father, Tadus Lemke, Halleck begins to lose weight at a steady rate despite the increase in his eating habits and in defiance of medical help which remains useless.

Eventually, coercion of the old man leads to a ritual which removes the curse. For all the apparent opposition between the magical and the mundane in the novel, the real symbolic force of the old man is developed in terms of cancer and a rejection of the body-conscious fear of mortality.

The old man has a rotting nose, explicitly attributed to the disease and his image as a disease/monster is cleverly compounded into a specific mockery of health-consciousness in the following passage with its address to the protagonist's own sense of mortality:

> 'Billy stared at the picture as if hypnotized. There was something almost familiar about the old man, some connection his mind wasn't quite making. Then it came to him. Tadus Lemke reminded him of those old men in the Dannon yoghurt commercials, the ones from Russian Georgia who smoked unfiltered cigarettes, drank popskull vodka, and lived to such staggering ages as a hundred and thirty, a hundred and fifty, a hundred and seventy. And then a line of a Jerry Jeff Walker song occurred to him, the one about Mr Bojangles: he looked at me to be the eyes of age...
>
> Yes. That was what he saw in the face of Tadus Lemke - he was the very eyes of age. In those eyes Billy saw a deep knowledge that made all the twentieth century a shadow, and he trembled.
>
> That night, when he stepped on the scales in the bathroom adjoining his wedge-shaped bedroom, he was down to 137'.[12]

Tadus Lemke is cast as the evil personification of Halleck's nemesis; the cancer made flesh, defying limits of age and in ignorance of healthy pursuits, he stands as the incarnation of Halleck's dawning fears of middle age: 'A man of your age, income and habits enters heart-attack country at roughly age thirty-eight Billy. You ought to take off some weight'.[13] What Billy gets is more accurately an impression of being a cancer patient as he wastes down to skeletal dimensions.

Thinner compares fascinatingly with The Incredible Shrinking Man as fictions of their time. The latter's diminution entails a removal from the values of a society in which the protagonist is becoming alienated. Eventually, he recovers dignity (of a traditionally masculine nature) in the face of adversity, and the film allows a final achievement of grace as it permits the existence of a transcendental, universal 'scheme of things' not yet understood, but into which our hero fits.

King's novel suggests little of this kind. The shrinking of the protagonist - a man wholly typical of his world - is of the most mundane fashion and entails little, if anything, in terms of spiritual or moral improvement and metaphysical reassurance. In fact, the novel's reserve of supernatural phenomena (and these are ambiguous in terms of their 'reality' status) is entirely the property of the malignant powers at large. (Even these are cancerous in themselves and ultimately open to mortality).

The scientific or rationalistic mode of this theme is given a surprisingly knowing and witty treatment in the low-budget

Forbidden World (Allan Holzman:1984) where the film's monster, in its cellular voraciousness and tissue-replicating ability, are specifically directed towards contemporary cancerophobia. The title and aspects of the story allude to Forbidden Planet where the monster is 'from the Id', whereas here it is a purely proteinaceous beast which scientific genius has unleashed.

The film's 'Metamorph' which roams the secret research establishment on a distant planet is disposed of in one of the more extraordinary finales ever constructed. The genius who has created it is, himself, suffering from terminal cancer. In a desperate act of self-sacrifice he uses a preparation based on cells extracted from his own cancerous liver having diagnosed the disease as metastasized. Injected into the Metamorph, the creature dies trying to assimilate the material in a violent metastasis of its own.

No one in the contemporary cinema demonstrates such a willingness to engage these issues than David Cronenberg whose work rarely deviates from a concern with body functions and physical limitation. (The drag-racing film Fast Company:1979 is the only major exception). More than anyone else in the field he is at pains to clarify his deliberate use of themes and images connected with revulsion at the body's processes as they are regarded by a society whose technical advancement stands in ironic contrast with its relatively unchanging mortal limits.

> 'All of my films are very body-conscious because, for me, the body is really the source of horror in human beings, because it is the body which ages and the body which dies

> ...(pause)...it really is very Cartesian of me I suppose because the mind/body split really, to me, is the source of the mystery and also of the horror which I think we ultimately have to confront. So that you see people whose minds are perfectly together while their bodies begin to distort, begin to change, begin to age, begin to rot, whatever. That to me is horror'.[14]

For all the alleged Cartesianism of the above claims - the reference to the Mind/Body dualism - it is nonetheless the body which takes priority and cannot be ignored; Mind finds no continuation beyond the body, beyond its physical status. The non-transcendent bleakness of death recurs in the director's films. Only two of his films begin to imply other possibilities: The Dead Zone (1985) where the heroic self-sacrifice of Christopher Walken, with its commitment to socially-transcendent values, was already present in the original novel by Stephen King, and Scanners (1980) where the telepathic minds of the protagonists are capable of transmigration to other bodies - the final scene - but are never really indicated to be capable of an existence outside of one. In the climactic confrontation between the hero, Cameron Vale (Stephen Lack) and his evil brother scanner, Darryl Revok (Michale Ironside) the eventual loser, Revok, survives with his body intact but is now inhabited by the mind of his victorious brother. His own mind is not able, for all its superior abilities, to transcend the need for a conventional, physical basis. This is eloquently given expression in the preceding duel which takes the form of a telekinetic assault on each

other's bodies, reminiscent in some ways of the famous battle of the warlocks in Corman's The Raven (1963). In the early film Boris Karloff and Vincent Price, seated at opposite ends of a room, cause magical objects to appear and attack each other. Here Vale and Revok cause each other's body to rebel. The Dick Smith-constructed effects - veins expanding and popping, eyes bursting, spontaneous combustion - comprise a spectacular vision of the flesh under assault. The scene is conducted in the sombre and modern environment of a corporation office, the mise-en-scène of which is typical of Cronenberg's fondness for using architecture and interior design to continue the underlying themes of his films. Cronenberg frequently uses modern architectural settings, especially the concrete and glass structures of the post-Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe tradition, to express a kind of rationalist desire for order and control, and a white surface and glass rejection of the disorderly potential of the human beings that inhabit and use them. Speaking of the film Rabid (1976), William Beard argues that,

> 'The Keloid Clinic performs the same function thematically as the Starliner Towers does in Shivers, enclosing the human animal in an envelope of clean lines and attractive proportions, smoothing over unsightly nature and denying the unacceptable warts and messy instincts of the body'.[15]

Similar claims are to be made for the Psycho-plasmics building in The Brood (1979) where Hal Raglan's (Oliver Reed) Swedish-style institution with its austere wood-panelled elegance is the scene of disturbing body mutations, or for the Spectacular Optical sales conference in Videodrome (1982) where the obnoxious businessman

Barry Convex (Les Carlson) quite literally comes to pieces. In these instances the body asserts itself, a source of disorder with its unpleasantly messy contents and re-awakening our sense of the irrational.

The architecture/decor aspect of these films also contributes to the construction of the consistently-portrayed social milieu of the characters as one of impersonality and emotionlessness, an essentially middle-class consumer-orientated world of dreary materialism.

In Shivers (1975) we find a stark example of this extended through the Starliner residential complex which houses the film's parasitically-infected victims and provides a setting for most of the film's action.[x] It is typical of a recurring situation in the director's work, of people stricken by physical afflictions that allude to the cancer myth and whose experience occurs in the context of an emotionally-diminished social life. Through the opening montage of advertising material presented in slideshow fashion, the apartments are characterized by their creature-comforts and the availability of in-house facilities including shops and a medical centre. The middle-class haven is treated in such a way, however, as to render these values in a negative light. Through the use of cheerlessly muted furnishings of an impersonal design, the sameness of the modern office-style fittings treated in a flat, bluish manner by the camera lighting and the unemotional and desultory exchanges between the residents, the lifestyle of the building is rendered uniform and unenviable. Cronenberg's reluctance to allow actions to

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[x] An autobiographical emphasis is added to the film by the knowledge that the complex - actually Nun's Island in Canada - was Cronenberg's, much detested, place of residence at the time.

take place outside the complex contributes to a sickening claustrophobic experience where stereotyped and unrewarding lives are lived out in a non-community of similar existences taking place in their respective isolation. The 'heightened symbolic closure' - in Jameson's phrase - of the microcosm impresses upon us the vision of the larger society, that of atomized and materialist western culture as a whole, and the Starliner development is found to be a 'division of General Structures Incorporated'. The most common form of interaction is physical and, as the narrative progresses, the sexual encounters of the residents become the basis for the transmission of the film's monster, a parasite which is passed on and which, in multiplying, encourages a behaviour geared solely to indiscriminate acts of sex. The film has been heavily criticized by Robin Wood who reads it as politically reactionary, for instance:

> 'Shivers systematically chronicles the breaking of every sexual-social taboo - promiscuity, lesbianism, homosexuality, age, difference, finally incest - but each step is presented as merely one more addition to the accumulation of horrors. At the same time, the film shows absolutely no feeling for traditional relationships (or for human beings for that matter): with its unremitting ugliness and crudity, it is very rare in its achievement of total negation'.[16]

Wood misses his own point here to some extent since it seems more useful to understand the film's sexual action as part of a generally-stated condition of materialism. The film is far from erotic in its treatment of the sexual encounters it shows, and, although this is partly why Wood and others may find it anti-sex, it is entirely in

keeping with Cronenberg's interest in the more mundane aspects of the body, being merely one of its basic functions; the actual parasites have been read as suggesting the phallus, but are equally turd-like in their design - they are as much an image of the excremental as anything else.

One reason for the film's feeling of distance and emotionlessness is the weak identification processes involved in its narration. Although it focuses eventually on the character of Dr Roger St. Luc (Paul Hampton) our engagement with him is limited in terms of actual screen time and by the camera strategy used to convey his presence to us; typically, he is anticipated rather than accompanied by the camera; framing is usually in long shot to medium, and rarely close-up, and subjective angles are rejected. Furthermore, St. Luc's control over the events of the narrative is - despite his initial fulfilment of the investigator/hero function - progressively negligible, culminating in the loss of his girlfriend/helper to the parasites and his own eventual collapse in the film's final moments. We are encouraged to witness the film with a more dispassionate eye than is usual as the individual is subsumed by the general. An unease about the subject runs throughout Cronenberg's films, developing the themes of lost control which centre around his use of body imagery; in Rabid it is a cell-growth experiment which runs amok, in The Brood the torments of mental patients finding expression in their flesh. These problems are taken to extremes in the director's later work as Videodrome constructs a wholly subjective world for the protagonist, Max Renn (James Woods), in which all sense of reality outside of his/our experience is removed. Similarly, Seth Brundle

(Jeff Goldblum), in The Fly:1986 finds himself genetically fused with a fly and is eventually fused with a machine.[x]

In Shivers, there is the sense of human individuality being compromised at the physical level by the pseudo-scientific premise of the experiment that unintentionally creates the film's monsters. Prior to their monstrous incarnation they were part of a medical programme to develop parasites which might be capable of performing - as an aspect of their survival in the human body - in the manner of the major organs. We would then become not just a victim but part of a symbiotic existence; our identity would be implicitly a double one, inseparable from this ordinarily repulsive organism and, in one way, self and other would be placed in a new relationship. Our marginalization of the status of other life-forms in favour of our own importance is quietly mocked in the film by a poster which reads: 'Sex is the invention of a clever venereal disease', and elsewhere, Cronenberg has added that disease is merely the attraction of two alien life-forms. As human beings it is our individuality, traditionally defined around the products of our mental life, which we use to justify our special place among living creatures, and it is this individuality which is so easily threatened by reminders of the physical existence we are forced to share with all other creatures, no matter how unpleasing they may be to us.

Both Shivers and Rabid draw upon images of bodily revolt which take place against the backdrop of the societal collapse they eventually precipitate. Each film is traceable to a fimiliar horror

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[x]As I write, Cronenberg has completed a new project, Dead Ringers: 1988, about two gynaecologists - identical twins - which indicates the likelihood of his continuing this trend in his work.

theme at the most basic narrative level - that of the transmission and amplification of a disease spread by bodily contact. This is fundamental to the vampire narratives and Rabid involves a young woman, Rose (Marilyn Chambers) whose transformation after an experimental, life-saving operation leaves her with an appetite for blood. Despite the contagion idea, much of the way in which the initial affliction or change is developed is suggestive of cancer in its more popular and mythical evocations.

In both films, the victims whose pathologies are explored in detail appear to be passively acceptant of their new condition despite its horrifying nature. Rose, in Rabid, is distressed and frightened at first, but feels unable to communicate to others (even though she awakens in a hospital) about the mutation she finds under her left arm. In Shivers, it is Nick Tudor (Alan Migicovsky) whose symptoms we are given in detail, and he remains similarly mute in the face of escalating disturbances in his body; wife and office colleagues are lied to in order to preserve the privacy of his suffering. The mutant tissue growth of Rose's arm[x] - the result of a failure to grow new intestines - is suggestive of the cellular independence associated with cancer, but it is Nick's development of tumescent lumps in his stomach (following the vomiting of blood) which evoke the most commonly known symptoms of cancer. An unwillingness to disclose being afflicted by cancer (unlike, say, M.S. or heart disease), even to speak its name, is one of the features which distinguish it from other ailments in contemporary society. This idea has a long history

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[x]The growth in the woman's armpit is unsettling in particular by its capacity to suggest breast cancer, secondary symptoms of which are popularly known to manifest themselves in the lymph nodes of this region.

indicated by the Oxford English Dictionary's non-technical definition of the word as 'Anything that frets, corrodes, corrupts or consume slowly and secretly',[17] and is argued by Sontag to form a cricial part of its present mythology:

> '[T]he 1966 Freedom of Information Act, cites "treatment for cancer" in a clause exempting from disclosure matters whose disclosure "would be an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy". It is the only disease mentioned.
>
> All this lying to and by cancer patients is a measure of how much harder it has become in advanced industrial societies to come to terms with death. As death is now an offensively meaningless event, so that disease widely considered a synonym for death is experienced as something to hide'.[18]

The sense of privacy is heavily emphasized in Shivers's initial scenes as Alan explores the new lumps that have appeared in his stomach. The cell-like qualities of the apartment are increased by the use of subdued lighting in the bathroom and bedroom scenes where the initial signs are developed, and, later, the emergence of one of the creatures from Nick's mouth is kept hidden from his wife even though she is sharing a bed with him at the time.

Scenes of social breakdown follow in both of the films, each of which leads to a conclusively hopeless vision of the protagonist's demise. The final shot of Rabid is especially bleak with a dog feeding on Rose's corpse prior to its disposal by white-suited

decontamination men who indifferently throw her into a refuse truck. What is developed in each case is the parallel fantasy of social and bodily collapse which is inflected by a construction of the self as hopeless victim to mysterious forces beyond control. Cells out of control are the problem in the two films, and this is the commonly understood basis of cancer as a disease, that cells cease to obey their normal patterns of growth and development and proliferate unchecked. This image transfers quite adequately to the idea of society depicted in the two stories with its members and running amok and its rules breaking down. Social and physical pathology, their respective ills, are often discussed with reference to common images of conflict as in this example from William Saroyan:

> 'As a man's conscience struggles with the opposites in his own nature, so do these opposites struggle in the whole body of the living - in the whole world. And that is when we have a war. The body is fighting off its diseases...'.[19]

It is cancer in particular which has attracted the use of conflict imagery. The idea of the disease as a ruthless colonizer is a pervasive one:

> 'The controlling metaphors in descriptions of cancer are, in fact, drawn...from the language of warfare: every physician and every attentive patient is familiar with, if perhaps inured to, this military terminology. Thus, cancer cells do not simply multiply; they are 'invasive'. ("Malignant tumours invade even when they grow very slowly", as one text book puts it). Cancer cells "colonize" from the original tumour to far sites in the

> body, first setting up tiny outposts ("micrometastases") whose presence is assumed, though they cannot be detected. Rarely are the body's "defences" vigorous enough to obliterate a tumour that has established its own blood supply and consists of billions of destructive cells. However "radical" the surgical intervention, however many "scans" are taken of the body landscape, most remissions are temporary; the prospects are that "tumour invasion" will continue, or that rogue cells will eventually regroup and mount a new assault on the organism'.[20]

Yet there is a difference between the reasonable tone of Saroyan's explanation of World War Two (the last just, and therefore intelligible, major conflict) and usual utilization of cancer imagery to express a sense of irrational and confusing behaviour. Here, Richard Selzer explains the disease to a victim's family:

> 'I tell them of the lesion, of how it began somewhere at the back of the stomach; how, long ago, no one knows why, a cell lost the rythm of the body, fell out of step, sprang, furious, into rebellion. I tell of how the cell divided and begat two of its kind, which begat four more and so on, until there was a race of lunatic cells, which is called cancer'.[21]

When cancer images are applied to society it is usually a result of failure to summon more analytical tools to grasp its condition, most often it applies to conceptions of it, in whole or in part, which

are dominated by feelings of negativity and hopelessness. The chaotic scenes of disorder in Rabid and Shivers might be seen in this way as a kind of metastasis of the films' original problems.

The later films of Cronenberg reject the crudity of these early pandemoniums but maintain a view of society which is consistent. The Brood presents an even more graphic and imaginative vision of the same fantasy. The plot involves research into 'psycho-p asmics' conducted at the 'Somafree Institute' by Dr Hal Raglan (Oliver Reed). In an initial scene we see how it involves the treatment of mental patients by encouraging them to externalize their inner tensions through a physical transformation of their bodies; a type of voluntary psychosomatics which anticipates the telekinetics of Scanners and is succinctly summarized by the title of Raglan's book 'The Shape of Rage'. The idea is a powerful one for it touches upon the very roots of so much human activity; the attempt to give expression to feelings which are pressing but incoherent or confusing. The Brood offers the most immediate of the body/society fantasies where social misfits display their disaffection through their flesh. The horrific results which arise from the experiment vary from the specific, where the film's neurotic mother Nola (Samantha Eggar) gives birth to asexually-reproduced and malformed children, and the more general as suggested by the character of Jan Hartog (Robert Silverman). Hartog, an ex-patient of Raglan's, reveals the unanticipated side-effects of his psycho-plasmics experience: a huge and grotesque lymphosarcoma of the throat. Like the other social misfits of the film he reveals a disgust with the world by a disgusting transformation in himself, and in keeping with the

metaphors we have just considered, it is described in the language of idiopathic upheaval and conflict: 'I've got a small revolution on my hands and I'm not putting it down very succesfully'.

Despite the common use of revolution as a metaphor there is little in this body of work to suggest any kind of serious analysis of social formations. Unlike the work of Romero or Craven, for example, who have presented visions of social breakdown and horror which are seen clearly to originate from specific social institutions - the family, patriarchy, capitalism - Cronenberg's films and the revulsion they evoke are far less easy to pin down. If the early films appear to direct a particular animosity towards women it is still the case that their most horrifying and unsettling elements are shared with later films like Scanners, The Dead Zone, Videodrome and The Fly which are far more ambivalent in the sexual relationships they portray. What all the films share is the creation of austere alienating architectural environments where (with the exception of The Dead Zone, the only film not originally written by the director) high-technology results in the bodily mutation of the protagonist/victim; they offer a basically paranoid response to the problem of formulating the modern self/society relationship where that self is established as thoroughly physical and at the mercy of large, secretive institutions - Con-Sec, Spectacular Optical - or the medical profession.

Cronenberg's films are consistent to a degree which is unusual in today's film industry, and display an ambivalence and intelligence indicative of a high level of self-consciousness. However, they also

share features which are characteristic of a more general trend in medical or hospital horror which we may consider now.

Hospital and Medical Horror

Death, according to Michael Lesy, in his recent book on the topic,[22] is more than ever fulfilling its role as laid out in John O'Hara's Appointment in Samarra, where a terrified man flees from an encounter with Death in Baghdad unaware that he is already scheduled to make an inevitable encounter with it later that day in Samarra. Modern medicine, at the moment in which it saves or extends our lives, assumes a dreadful ambivalence; the reminder, even arbiter of our non-transcendent mortality. Why should an institution whose function is to ease suffering evince such frequently-experienced feelings of dread? It is a common experience for people to feel awkward upon merely contemplating a hospital ward, or to feel queasy, even faint, upon visiting a hospital. As a source of drama there are few more fertile subjects since the potential of death permits the investment of grandeur into the smallest detail of its functioning. As a consequence we find two established traditions which attest to its ambivalent position in our feelings: the melodrama or soap opera and the horror story or black comedy.

The former is geared towards providing images of reassurance with regard to the depiction of hospital life and the medical profession, guaranteeing that our lives are safe in their hands. The human face of the profession is delivered in the caring figure of the country G.P. or M.D. like Dr Finlay or Marcus Welby, or in the impeccable bedside manner of a Dr Kildare. On the other hand, efficiency may be

portrayed in the rapid-fire orders and emergency procedure of the hospital in Emergency Ward Ten or Casualty. One of the most common sub-plots is that of the tension caused by the clash of personal and professional life (to which there is only one acceptable outcome). The reassurance that personal sacrifice will triumph and professional duties will be executed is tailored perfectly to the demands of melodrama as a genre.

Conversely, the latter tradition begins with the fear that the humanitarian face of medicine will collapse, exposing the subject to callous and lethal indifference (black humour and satire: The National Health:Jack Gold:1973, The Hospital:Arthur Hiller:1971) or mutilation and death at the hands of a terrifying technology (Coma: Michael Crichton:1978, Terminal Choice:Sheldon Larry:1984).

A considerable number of films draw upon a kind of medical-horrific affect, ranging in their deployment of images from allusion to the medical, such as the dental chair scene from Marathon Man (John Schlesinger:1976), to full scale hospital narratives like Coma which present a kind of totalitarian hospital world. In the latter instance where the full range of contemporary doubts about medicine can be exercised, it is possible to see the interaction of several major discursive tendencies. The medical-horrific is, to a greater or lesser extent, reliant upon the following interrelated cultural conditions: the contemporary horror film's unquestionable obsession with the physical constitution and destruction of the body; a paranoid tendency in social/political thought; a complex of negative images which inform popular attempts to address the problems of death

and of dying - especially insofar as they are subject to the influence of medical technology and institutional bureaucracy.

To commence with the question of contemporary perceptions of death, raised at the beginning of this chapter, we may recall that the body - our physical existence - has ascended to a new level of importance in our culture, the sign of our non-transcendent secular status and the atomized individuality of our social identity. Death is hideous in its bluntness, finality and lack, even, of style as represented in the following passage which describes the mortician's use of the 'suction trocar', a device for removing bodily contents prior to embalming:

> 'The heart is empty. The technician turns the tool downward, into the abdomen once more. Now are the intestines pierced, coil upon coil, collapsing their gas and their juice to the sink. It is brown in the glass connector. Thunk, thunk, the rod smites the pelvis from within. The dark and muffled work is done: the scrotum is skewered, the testicles mashed, ablaze with their billion whiptail jots. All, all into the sink - and then to the sewer. This is the ultimate suck'.[23]

The body's demystification as matter - waste matter in the above case - proceeds throughout the whole of Hollywood's output with deaths assuming an ever more grotesque and inelegant aspect. But in the medical-horror context the body is often examined in a fascinated, pseudo-objective manner. Slow tracking or panning shots often allow us to take in surgical detail at greater leisure than the shock-cutting

of more conventional horror permits, as if we were indulging a professional interest in the scene; sharing the surgeon's eye. We return, again and again, to close-ups of the skin graft Rose is being given in Rabid, taking in the exactness of the flesh's removal, its folding up for transfer and the details of the instruments involved. While Dr Keloid delivers a formal (if fictional) account of the surgical techniques involved. Rose/Marilyn Chambers' body is, for the moment at least, demystified from character function.

The effect becomes even clearer in its purpose when it occurs in literary examples of the same tendency which includes novels like Stuart Kinder's The Institute, Raymond Hawkey's Side Effect or Robin Cook's two successful works, Coma and Brain.[24]

> Here is a striking example from Brain:
> 'The knife blade plunged down just behind the right clavicle at the base of the neck, slicing through the upper lobe of the lung before piercing the right pulmonary artery. Blood poured into the open bronchus, causing a reflex agonal cough, which sent the blood hurling from the mouth in a ballistic arc over the top of Phillip's head, drenching the table in front of him.[25]

The dispassionate style of narration emerges in what seems like the prose of a forensic pathologist, where humanity is reduced merely to the sum of bodily functions. Although nerve endings might well have been included among these, issues of pain are evaded with the effect of reducing an emotionally-charged event to the straight-

forward description of a system being disrupted or destroyed. Furthermore, it should be noted that this instance is a murder and is removed from the immediate context of the medical, e.g. an operating theatre. In this fashion, the book manages to extend the anxieties about its basic theme of medical horror through conspiracy to the entire world of the narrative so as to constantly remind us that all the characters, everyone, ourselves, are but cells and organs etc. In particular, they/we are composed of material better understood by others, employing a language of description largely alien to us. Simultaneously a measure of power is given over to these people and a portion of our identity is threatened and in some ways detached from us, made strange.

One way of locating these developments might be to situate the films and books within the wider discursive formations that Michel Foucault has identified as the basis of a new economy of power in society. Briefly, this sees emergence, outlined most clearly in his work Discipline and Punish,[26] of a 'political technology of the body' in which the reproduction of the social formation, crucially relying upon the body as an instrument of production, is in part effected by the constitution of the body as an object as well as a subject, as a knowable quantity for both physical and political regulation:

> '...it was a question of not treating the body, en masse, "wholesale", as if it were an indissociable unity, but of working it "retail", individually; of exercising upon it a subtle coercion, of obtaining holds upon it at the level of the mechanism itself - movements, gestures, attitudes,

rapidity: an infinitesimal power over the active body'.[27]

This process of regulation extended to the purview of modern medicine as a medical rationalism allowed a

> '...period in which illness, counternature, death, in short, the whole dark underside of disease came to light, at the same time illuminating and eliminating itself like night, in the deep, visible, enclosed but accessible space of the human body'.[28]

This recasting of the unknown within the parameters of the human body has led to a powerfully ambivalent sense of the institutionalized forces of modern medicine. According to Foucault,

> '...medicine offers man the obstinate, yet reassuring face of his finitude; in it, death is endlessly repeated, but it is also exorcised; and although it ceaselessly reminds man of the limit that it bears within him, it also speaks to him of that technical world that is the armed, positive, full form of his finitude'.[29]

Modern medicine, its methods of quantification and treatment, its technology, technique and power, stands, at once, as that which improves or prolongs our (physical) existence, and the constant signifier of its limitations; a condition which enables it to oscillate freely between the poles of reassurance and disturbance within our imagination. The scalpel and the syringe are easily transformed into instruments of torture and special menace due to the peculiar fantasies of powerlessness with which we customarily contemplate their use. In Blind Date (Nico Pastorakis:1984), a murder/thriller film with medical overtones based on a series of scalpel killings, a murder is

filmed through the eyes of a minor character/victim, commencing with a point of view shot from an operating table (or similar) where a gradual coming-into-focus recreates the anaesthetic experience. We then are given, prior to the killing, an intercutting of close-ups and big close-ups of the scalpel and a terrified eye responding. Our concerns in this area become more apparent and more complex when they are given expression through the use of the more technologically complex aspects of medicine.

Medical Bureaucracy and Technophobia

> 'And then they put you in intensive care, and they put you in a room and hook your shit up with wires. You be looking like Frankenstein layin' there; tubes and shit all in your nose and you get to watch your life beep away. You hear the machine: "Doo...Doo...Doo...Doo... Doo...". If you hear, "Doooooooooooooo". Cancel Christmas!
>
> One morning I woke up and I heard, "Doooooooooooooo". I said, "Aaaaaaaaaaaagh". (pause) "Doo...Doo...Doo ...Doo...Doo...".
> (Richard Pryor (live concert))

Humour in the above routine is an attempt to negotiate the unthinkable; a symbolic victory of authentic human panic sufficing to stifle and countermand the machine's unfeeling announcement of death. An identical situation is shown us in Faces of Death (Conan le Ciliare: 1981) a film in the Mondo Cane tradition[30] which offers the viewer

a randomly organized and pseudo-documentary collection of deaths, some animal, some human, some quite evidently faked. The opening sequence is centred around a man in a hospital bed supos edly enjoying his last few moments alive in a state of unconsciousness. The man is of Latin appearance and the hospital of Third World quality to reassure us of the footage's authenticity, i.e. 'life is cheap' here'. Our attention is directed, in the absence of any vital signs from the patient himself, to the screen of the E.C.G. machine and its familiar heart-bleep. The machine's output begins to register the man's apparently deteriorating condition, eventually assuming the role of an impersonal arbiter of life and death. Eventually, its signal becomes the continuous tone of non-activity; the corpse appears mocked by the Schadenfreude of the machine's sheer disinterest. (It is interesting to compare this with a similar scenario in the melodramatic Dallas where, during the 'death' of Bobby Ewing, intercutting with the E.C.G. machine in close-up functioned more as an index of the anguish of the assembled relatives).

Despite the immaculate order of the hospital, its obsessive brilliance and asepticism, the banishment of the signifiers of death and decay, it remains one of the most intractable sanctuaries of modern terror. Through the image of fully-institutionalized medical practice, hospitals, banks of life-support equipment, the inscrutable terminology, the rigid regime and hierarchy, one's own body rendered alien, regulated, labelled, categorized, re-arranged, manipulated, scrutinized and dissected, we experience the powerful and pervasive fantasy of the subject as defenseless matter becoming integrated into a wider frame of reference in which the institutional

and organizational aspects of medicine - denuded of bedside manner - focus their conspiratorial attentions upon it. In different ways, films like Coma, Terminal Choice and S.S. Experiment Camp offer graphic fantasies of the body subjected to the terrors of an alien and totalitarian regime. The idea that our bodies can be mismanaged or needlessly interfered with, is a theme common enough for it to have colonized popular humour and gossip. That this cannot happen, is the comforting message which most hospital melodrama of the Dr Kildare variety attempt to provide. More and more, though, we are offered disturbing rather than anodyne visions. The hospital lends itself perfectly to allegorical visions of social dystopianism, forming the basis for black comedy in The National Health, The Hospital, One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest (Milos Forman:1975) and Britannia Hospital (Lindsay Anderson:1982). In all of these films inhumanity, malpractice and neglect are established as routine. It requires only a small shift of the imagination for the surgeon to become the slasher of Blind Date or Visiting Hours (Jean-Claud Lord:1981). In the former, a maniac murders while dressed up as a surgeon, marking the bodies out in advance as if in a theatre. The latter involves a psychopath in doctor's garb stalking the wards of a hospital and free to strike at will at the helpless patients who either trust him or do not see him.

In The Hospital, in which Paddy Chayevsky's script diagnoses the great American disease as 'vestigial identity', the level of incompetence falls little short of murder and prompts the chief of medicine, played by George C. Scott, to shout at the head nurse: 'My God, where do you train your nurses Mrs Christie...Dachau?' This

image becomes the reality of S.S. Experiment Camp, which depicts a medical experimentation unit run by an SS Kommandant/surgeon. Sexual experiments are conducted using male SS volunteers and women prisoners, the ultimate rationale for which is an intended testicle transplant for the camp's castrated chief. The ludicrous narrative distributes its interests between a literal castration fantasy and repeated instances of torture and death via the agency of a total institution. The victims, mainly women, are subjected to a range of pseudo-experimental apparatus, from temperature-varying devices to compressed air generators, all of which are finally used as instruments of torture.

A more sophisticated technophobia is conveyed by The Manitou (William Girdler:1977), which tries, and fails, to restore our faith in the machine. Karen Tandy (Susan Strasberg) is suffering from a strange lump, tumour-like, which has suddenly appeared on the back of her neck. Its massive growth rate confounds the experts and it is eventually discovered to contain some sort of living entity. This turns out to be the latest incarnation of a powerful Native American medicine man. He is in pain due to the preliminary X-ray photography and is horribly deformed on hatching out. He begins to take revenge on the hospital using magic to call up various spirits (manitous). The advice of another medicine man proves adequate until the idea is arrived at of summoning the manitou of the hsopital's giant computer. Here cancerophobia is combined with topical fears about pre-natal health - the tumescence combines the ideas of birth and cancer - and the scientific apparatus of the film is opposed, semantically , to magic. The reassuring litany of operating theatre dialogue and its

procedural calmness is interrupted by primitive magic and attempts to operate on the lump result in a surgeon being forced to turn his knife upon himself and medical equipment going haywire. There is an underlying doubt, running throughout the text, about medicine's capacity to fulfil its role as secular saviour, still a suspicion that more arcane forces may prevail despite our trust in the rational. It is this doubt which this film attempts (unlike The Exorcist:William Friedkin:1973) to dispel by discovering that the computer has a manitou, in other words, a soul. Humanizing the machine results as a failure to find a satisfying non-metaphysical answer. If the real potential of computer technology, ever to approach the capability of the human mind,is a remote one, nonetheless, the image of articificial intelligence as a consciousness without feeling maintains a popular role in conspiracy-thrillers. Even when not subject to more extreme fantasies of technological autonomy - as in The Forbin Project or Demon Seed[31] - the computer functions ominously as the indifferent witness to human suffering, or an accomplice to crimes it is incapable of exercising a moral decision over. (It is Asimov's famous 'Laws of Robotics' which first showed a concern with this, incorporating a mandatory prohibition against the commission or permission of against humans).[32]

This is apparent in Terminal Choice as part of a highly paranoid vision of hospital misconduct. In an extremely modern and sophisticated institution, where the closest possible supervision of patients is accomplished by continual and detailed computer-controlled monitoring, murders are conducted by the reprogramming of the computer to deliver improper dosages of medicines.

The reduction or marginalization of human identity is fundamental to these bleak and paranoid scenarios. High-tech is responsible for reducing subjects to objects, people to things. At its most hysterical, we find visions of appalling conspiracies, of secret and corrupt schemes which level their sights on the victim as patient; as body. In the following quotation from Brain (Robin Cook: 1982) identity is literally stripped away with the knife, and has become integrated with that of technology:

> 'Martin slowly began to walk around the container. It was at least six feet high and three feet in diameter. Inside, submerged in what Martin later learned was cerebro-spinal fluid, were the living remains of Catherine Collins. She floated in a sitting position with her arms suspended over her head. A respiration unit was functioning, indicating that she was alive. But her brain had been completely exposed. There was no skull. Most of the face was gone except for the eyes, which had been dissected free and covered with contact lenses. An endotracheal tube issued from her neck.
>
> Her arms had also been carefully dissected to extract the ends of the sensory nerves. These nerve endings looped back like strands of a spider's web to connect with electrodes buried within the brain'.[33]

In a more blunt formulation, which nonetheless gets to the core of the issue, a character in Terminal Choice laments, 'Yesterday there was this lady I liked named Mary O'Connor. Tonight she's a piece of meat...'

Fear of such identity loss, particularly as it appears in the context of high-technology, recurs in the works of Michael Crichton whose novels and films[34] betray his medical background. In The Terminal Man, for instance, the central character - who has demonstrated increasingly violent tendencies as a response to developing a phobia about being taken over by machines - is given an implant in his brain of a device which is supposed to control his aggression; i.e. his paranoid delusion is ironically the basis for its becoming reality.[35] Examining Crichton's most rounded achievement Coma:1978 (Crichton.wr/dr.), John Sutherland points to its attempt to 'manage' fears about contemporary medicine; transplant surgery, medicare expenses, iatrogenic illness, medical malpractice and the problem of legally-defined death are all contemporary areas of public concern of which the film's narrative makes use.[36] If all of these topics are introduced, it must be emphasized that this is hardly in order to conduct an extended debate around them. Rather it is their ability to furnish us with mutually-informing sources of anxiety which have the appearance of a single force, that of an unstoppable and de-humanizing medical technology. Coma's particular effectiveness lies in its fusion of two discourses structured by fears of losing identity; the medical-horrific discourse which provides the basis for most of the film's settings and events is inextricably combined with one devoted to defining the heroine, Susan Wheeler (Geneviève Bujold) in respect of her independence.[37] Consequently questions of sexual identity are surrounded with less usual ones about human identity in general.

Coma

Plot Summary: Dr Susan Wheeler, a junior member of staff at the

Boston Memorial Hospital, becomes suspicious when her friend lapses into an irreversible coma during the performance of a routine surgical operation. An examination of hospital computer files reveals an abnormally high incidence of such events in the recent past. Despite obstructions from the hospital hierarchy, notably the Chief of Surgery, Dr George Harris (Richard Widmark), she conducts her own investigation. This ultimately reveals the existence of a terrible conspiracy involving the Jefferson Institute, an ultra-modern intensive-care unit where patients are maintained by computer-assisted technology after being placed in deliberately-induced comas. The truth finds them serving as convenient sources of organs which the centre sells off to the highest bidder. Susan's crusade reaches a climax where her own life is threatened; anaesthetized, she is set up to be operated upon, reduced to a coma, until her previously unconvinced partner (Michael Douglas) comes to her aid.

The casting of Geneviève Bujold, an actress with a confident and self-possessed performance style and rather masculine vocal delivery, provides the character of Susan with a plausible persona by which she may be readily identified by the audience as a popular image of the independent woman. Seen by Christine Geraghty as an instance of Hollywood's attempt to present an image of the 'new woman', Coma is claimed to have attempted a consistent treatment of material displaying an awareness of 'women's issues'.[38]

Geraghty's argument states an intention to focus on questions of identification rather than medical ethics and this seems to me to be still the most rewarding avenue of approach. What needs to be

extended, however, is the consideration of the identification problem in a context that takes account of the medical/horrific discourses at work in the film, since they are powerful textual currents which partially and crucially resist the attempt by the script and the direction to co-opt them into the film's questioning of conventional and reactionary attitudes of men towards women. For instance, if it can be argued, as the above writer does, that Coma, 'calls into question the form of the film /fantasy/thriller/ and the traditional role of the heroine', there are several moments which create severe problems for any reading of the film which seeks to understand Susan's role as an unproblematic insertion into the conventionally male role of investigator. In each of the following scenes Susan is clearly established as the object, rather than the subject of the discourses in play:

a) In the scene where Susan showers in Mark's apartment she is seen naked through the misted glass of the shower-screen. Although conducting an argument with Mark, she is placed squarely in the background, a conventionally-framed erotic object, while we share the foregrounded intimacy of Mark's side of the conversation in close-up. There is a case for reading the sheer obviousness of the scene's sexism as deliberately alienating, given the fact that the conversation is quite clearly meant to illustrate Mark's chauvinism and self-concern, but at best this results in a rather contradictory rather than constructively ambivalent achievement.

b) In the scene with the psychologist. We cut to this scene abruptly after Susan's encounter with Dr Harris where she is obliged to account for her unorthodox (implicitly irrational) behaviour. We see her

emotionally overcome, confessing, as it were, in a situation where she is, by its very nature, the object of investigation.

c) The hospital's Chief Resident calls in Mark for a meeting which Susan is unaware of. We and they are privy to a discussion of her possible obstruction to Mark's career which is plainly meant to contribute to a portrait of the film's male characters that is conspiracist and pompous. Yet this adds to the range of material which excludes Susan,the investigator, criticizing her and increasing the audience's awareness of her vulnerability.

d) After a scene in which Susan breaks down in front of Dr Harris and is presented at her most vulnerable, his apparently sympathetic manner is revealed to be merely a manipulatory tactic; once she leaves the room, he utters, 'Women, Christ!' in a disgusted manner and with only the viewer for an audience.

d) Finally, there is a conversation between the psychiatrist and Dr Harris which discusses her condition without Susan's presence and without any attempt to qualify their interests.

There are certain obvious objections to this kind of treatment following feminist propositions about women being typically constructed as the objects of investigation, with their body functioning as a central part of their mystery or enigma. But there is something so brash about these particular oversights in a film that is otherwise persistent in addressing and questioning male dominance. A close examination of the text reveals a self-consciousness about the investigation of identity centered around

notions of the body and finding expression through two, overlapping discourses:

1) An analytical attempt to explain the treatment of Susan and the events she investigates as a result of a social order based on capitalism and patriarchy. This is specifically constructed as a political issue with the body functioning in relation to notions of the gendered subject.

2) A symptomatic and paranoid use of the medical horror discourse, utilizing technophobic anxieties about society to fund the film's major images of the monstrous. This discourse derives its explanatory power from conspiracy fantasies, these again finding a point of expression via the image of the body under threat.

Before embarking on an investigation of how these are developed in the film's detail, we may note that they offer, as a pair of co-existent discourses about investigating the body, a basic contradiction; the former discourse wishes to encourage a positive image of the female investigator as active and opposed in this by a social system, the latter subscribes to feelings of powerlessness in the face of inscrutable technology and secret decisions taken by 'evil' individuals. What makes the film so intriguing and ultimately confusing is the fusion of these strands at the level of the body.

The Body General

In each of the film's two main interpretive frameworks, the hospital functions as a microcosmic view of the social order (we may include the Jefferson Institute as part of this vision and

representing a kind of monstrous reductio ad absurdam). In the conspiracist discourse, the institution is celebrated by Dr George Harris (Richard Widmark) as the supreme representative of our culture with his declaration that, 'these great hospital complexes are the cathedrals of our time'. The ascendancy of a culture founded upon an uncaring rationalism is implicit in this intimation that the physical has displaced the spiritual, and his conclusion that the 'individual is too small'. The sense of human feelings haveng been abdicated in favour of efficiency and cost-effectiveness is heightened by the nurse at the Jefferson Institute who smugly advises visitors that,

> 'No moral or ethical decision is taken here; we do not participate in the debate as to whether the unfortunate patients are alive or dead...society will decide as to whether there will be more of these facilities in the future. In the meantime, we merely provide care as inexpensively as possible'.

An indifference or threat to the subject's identity, especially as it is represented in terms of the body, is developed out of this vision of society to permeate various levels of the text; we may, for convenience, break them down as follows:

1) The recurring image of depersonalization:
   a) The body reduced to an unthinking existence; coma and, ultimately, death.
   b) The personality diminished in its emotional capacity; the psychotic rationalism of Dr Harris, the robot-like nurse at the Jefferson institute. The nurse's exaggeratedly monotonous voice acts almost as a parody of the frequent technical discussions of the hospital staff in the film, who tend to deliver the details of

their job as if they were part of some kind of non-human machine themselves.

2) The intrusion of, or merging with, machinery and the quantification or manipulation of the body. In many instances identity is lost to the machine.

a) Patients are revealed to have been tissue typed and stored on the computer. Their identities are reduced to the physical, by coma, and then characterized by the nature of their tissue. It is to be expected that this kind of fear will increase in the light of recent 'genetic fingerprinting' techniques allowing us all to be exclusively identified by our DNA rather than our personalities.

b) The film is littered with images of human beings coupled up to the usual array of hospital equipment, entubated and catheterized. The most disturbing vision of this kind, of people merged with machinery, is the revelatory scene at the Jefferson Institute. This extraordinary moment is held back as part of an ongoing mystery about the Institute's activities and is delivered as a highlight of the film (certainly, it seems to be the image which remains clearest in people's memories of the film). A large and sterile chamber is entered, in which are suspended about twenty patients. Almost naked, they are a kind of comatose community supported entirely by the machinery to which they are coupled. The machines and a computer are effectively indistinguishable

from the bodies they serve, being automatically responsive to the slightest changes in physical status of the patients.

3) The style of the film's mise-en-scène consistently produces a de-centreing of the individual, especially Susan.

a) Through the frequently intrusive use of background sounds. Often there is an unusually loud volume level on the background track allowing foreground dialogue to be intruded upon and competed with. Notably this includes the overlapping of conversation (in the manner of Altman's M.A.S.H.) near the beginning of the film which promotes a kind of pseudo-documentary impression. This is especially effective as all the surgeons are speaking in a kind of dull monotone about mainly technical matters. Individual conversations tend to be swamped by this homogenizing process.

There is also the persistent use of loud hospital equipment sounds which cut through conversation. For example, in the scene which announces the fact of Tom Selleck's coma, where the shock of realization is heralded by the unusually loud bleeps of the intensive care apparatus.

b) By use of setting and composition of visual elements. The general locations of the Boston Memorial Hospital and the Jefferson Institute offer bleak modern environments devoid of human touches and conveying an aseptic sense of order. On top of this, there are

> frequent uses of this modern architectural environment to dominate the frame in shots which suggest the individual is threatened or oppressed. This is evident in the isolating of Susan's figure on entering the Jefferson Institute where framing makes use of the unbalanced angles of the building's concrete and glass design. Later Susan is again placed in an engulfing world of pipes and conduits in the hospital's basement. Other claustrophobic effects are achieved by the constricting views of Susan both in the corridors of the Institute and in the service ducting of the hospital.

4) Finally, there is the entire thrust of the film's conspiracy which is predicated upon the deliberate killing of people to use as organ sources. The shock of this revelation is delivered when Susan finds Tom Selleck's body, dead and plundered for parts. This kind of blunt reduction of person or character to mere flesh becomes more effective with time as the star persona of Tom Selleck has developed with his success as an actor. This process implies some kind of basic fear about society which links capitalism, consumerism and technology in a rather ill-defined manner. The body becomes the final commodity as its parts are sold off by auction to the highest bidder on a computer. Columbia University, Professor Erwin Chargaff, in an article on Biotechnology in Nature, expressed similar fears when he stated that, 'What I see coming is a gigantic slaughterhouse, a molecular Auschwitz in which valuable enzymes, hormones and so on will be extracted instead of gold teeth'. What is lacking is any real grounding in

social structure, e.g. class. What is offered is a more generalized vision of society recycling parts of some people to help people somewhere else, with profits coming back to maintain the system itself. One great general and pointless recycling without ethical foundation or further purpose. Overall the film offers a classic paranoid and dystopian vision, a direct fantasy of the social acting on the body of the individual.

Running parallel to, and overlapping with, this conspiracist fantasy is the accumulation of textual strategies which argue a more political view of the body of the heroine.

The Body Particular

In this discursive tendency the social order is defined as patriarchal, allowing for the possibility of explicitly political readings of Susan's struggle against the hospital regime. Again, we may break down the film's attempt to construct this argument into several broad strategies:

1) By placing the film's treatment of the body within the domain of politics:

a) The two institutions are specifically named in ways which allude to the political life of America. Boston is known not just as a centre of medical excellence, but also as - outside of Washington - the political city.[39] This is given a deeper implication in the naming of the Jefferson Institute; the invocation of one of the 'founding fathers' of the American political system implies not only a situation arising from the fundamental basis of society, but one established by men.

b) Hospital events and decisions are explicitly attributed to the province of the political. Power and influence recur as a feature of hospital life, as for instance, in the concern with Dr George's (Rip Torn) connections with wealth necessary to the hospital, and which provide grounds for trying not to offend or challenge his authority. Perhaps the most interesting is the connection, made at the opening af the film, in which the political is suggested to be inclusive of the body: A montage of scenes from hospital life introduces us to the world of the Boston Memorial. This representative view includes scenes of an operati n in progress. The leisurely and detached camera-work that takes in the details of the scene culminates in a purposeful vertical pan downwards to rest on the body; the focus of the events taking place. As it does so, we hear a discussion on the soundtrack which commences with the words, 'It's all politics'. It belongs to the next scene (an exchange between Mark and Susan, in his apartment) but offers itself as a comment on the image of the body before us. This anticipatory use of dialogue establishes the body in direct relation to questions of the political which is then developed by the apartment scene to make specific points in connection with gender. This leads on to the second strategy of the film in which it attempts to establish Susan's struggle as one generated by her challenge to patriarchal power.

2) In the apartment scene above, we witness an argument as to whether Mark or Susan ought to have priority in the shower. Despite the similar status of their jobs, Mark is unable to take an even-handed approach. His outrage at Susan's defying his wish is compounded by an understanding that his day is somehow tougher to get through, and his off-handedly chauvinistic request for Susan to fetch him a beer. This personal conflict is placed in the context of Mark's obsession with hospital intrigue. This is also placed as being a male concern by implication, when he declares - after Susan's comment on his obsession - 'Somebody has to be interested in hospital politics. You're not'. Throughout the film, there are systematic divisions placed between men and women which continue this theme of women excluded from a system dominated by men and in which they feature as objects rather than subjects. Again, there is a number of identifiable strategies and important scenes in which this distinction is developed:

a) The general emphasizing of the hospital staff as male. In particular, the film establishes all of the characters who occupy posts of authority in the hospital's hierarchy as male; Chief of Surgery, Chief of Anaesthesia, Chief Resident and Psychiatrist. Not only are they all men, but they (notably in the first three) are portrayed as especially patronizing and smug in respect to Susan and, adding Mark to the list, are given moments in which they discuss Susan in her absence. This accumulates a sense of male conspiracy in the hospital.

b) According to Geraghty, the opening credit sequence functions largely to establish Susan's professional status,

> 'placing the heroine...firmly in relation to her work: we see her drive up to the hospital and then at various points during the day - describing a case (in highly technical terms) to colleagues and students, scrubbing up, performing an operation etc. Thus, when the credits end, we have economically established the fact of Susan's work and an indication of her professionalism and confidence'.[40]

But the treatment of the scene in the hospital is more ambivalent than this view allows. What is also important is the decision to make it a woman - elderly and appearing nervous or worried - who is the object of their medical discussion. The conversation, mostly from Susan, is about the woman and conducted in the woman's presence but with total disregard for her apparent concern. This point is emphasized by the decision to shoot the scene from the patient's point-of-view, using low-angle, over-the-shoulder camera positions to exaggerate the authority of the assembled medical staff.

The scene's overall meaning has to take this into account, balancing off Susan's professional image against this negative impression of the patient's objectification and misery. (The scene is topped off with a remark from the Chief resident that confirms his worries over the case as connected with bureaucratic rather than medical or humanitarian matters).

c) The event which provides the basis for Susan's investigation - the basis for the entire narrative - is the death of her friend, Nancy Greenly. The terms in which this relationship is established and the operation which causes her coma are such that they imply a kind of punishment for transgressing the rules of patriarchal society.

i) We first see them together in the dance class which Susan attends for relaxation from the hospital regime. Its contrast with the hospital is crucial. First of all, it is a scene in which Susan appears to be genuinely happy and at ease, and its significance develops out of its image of physical expression. It is established as a space for women in the film and in which they are in charge of their bodies; the celebration of bodily control, health, pleasure and fitness is defined outside of male presence and offers a direct rejection of the film's horrific fear of medical/patriarchal punishment and objectification of the body. It is in this scene that Nancy reveals to Susan her intention to have an immediate abortion to prevent her husband's knowledge of an affair she is conducting. This attempted secret, revealed to another woman, euphemistically maintained under the pretext of a dilatation and curettage operation for menstrual irregularity, is blandly exposed in a matter of fact lesson by the gynaecological surgeon in the following scene:

ii) In the operation Nancy is drugged and virtually unconscious while the surgeon knowingly informs his male colleagues that the 'd&c' is really a therapeutic abortion. Nancy is 'exposed' in this way, discussed like the woman in the earlier scene as an object in her very presence. This feeling is continued by the emphasis placed upon the manipulation of her body; eyes taped, legs placed in stirrups and entubated. The manipulation of her body stands in direct contrast with her self-possession in the dance class. The final development - the mysterious loss of brain function - is suggested, via the symbolic codes of the narrative, as related to Nancy's transgressive secret

Although the film does introduce the idea of male as well as female victims, with the case of Tom Selleck, we are not present at his operation and he is given a characteristically masculine reason for the surgery - playing ball with his friends. The real emphasis is upon female patients in the two extended scenes which deal with attempts to produce coma. In the second - that of Dr Harris's attempt to deal with Susan - we are brought into identification with the patient/heroine in a direct manner by the use of subjective camera-work and soundtrack; as the sequence is initiated in Harris's office and Susan is drugged, we share her distorted perceptions with the use of a fish-eye lens and effects added to the dialogue on the soundtrack.

iii) The most brutal image of this male attempt to objectify and depersonalize women and its direct linking to structures of control is that offered in the pathology lab scene which acts as the comment upon Nancy's death. Susan visits the lab in order to check the findings of her friend's autopsy; Nancy is lying on the table, already dissected by the pathologist and his assistant - both are male. Two aspects of the scene stand out with respect to our argument. First of all, the emphasizing of the body as flesh and as the object of male investigation; there is a detailed view of Nancy's brain being sliced up and laid out for examination. Her identity loss is brought home again by this. We are then given a low-angle close-up of the pathologist looking down at the tissue through the lens of a large magnifying glass.

This is then extended to ideas about masculine domination through the lighthearted conversation of the two pathologists. Susan asks whether it is possible to kill someone without leaving a trace. Suddenly the men are excited by the challenge and the image of the surgeon as killer is invoked: 'Who'd know better how to murder than a pathologist?' and after a discussion of possibilities the assistant comments with, 'It sure keeps my wife in line'. The line is delivered flippantly but is entirely consistent with the rest of the film's treatment of this theme.

What the film does is direct us specifically to problems of the female body in relation to general ideas of male control, and specific challenges to the status quo represented by Susan. In this reading, the idea of body politics is raised in its most literal understanding and the image of the coma suggests itself as a possible grand metaphor for the (male) system's attempt to reduce women to a state of life without thought, self-determination, pleasure or meaning. Following this, Susan's struggle is one which attempts to challenge and reject this state of affairs. She resists the tendency to objectification in many ways by playing the role of the investigative heroine. Usually male, this role cedes access to knowledge customarily obtained or guaranteed by possession of the look, by being confirmed as the subject of the visual discourses established in the film. Susan's establishment in this role is defined by her investigations of the computer, the service ducts, the autopsy, the Jefferson Institute and so on. The issue of looking is also referred to in the film by its series of images related to the theme: the taping over of Nancy's eyes in the operating theatre, the scrutinizing of her brain by the pathologist with the magnifying glass, the close-up of the fatal electrocution of the janitor who is about to reveal information to Susan, which shows sparks arcing from his eye.

It is possible to argue that the problematic shower scene, which indulges the viewer with a shot of Susan through the wall of the cubicle - a classical case of erotic objectification from Mark's point of view - is alienating due to Mark's sexist commentary; that it tends to be so in view of the film's acknowledgement of this type of discourse as fundamentally sexist. What seems to be more problematic

is the way that the other scenes, mentioned earlier, place Susan as an object of male comment. This is where the problem of combining an attempt to politicize the treatment of the female body with the metaphorical potential of the medical horror discourse seems to arise. The latter is constructed within familiar, generic lines tending towards the conspiracist and symptomatically paranoid rather than the former's necessarily analytical premise. In other words, we are left with a conflict of interests, where the realist implications of considering the status of the female body and its representation in a patriarchal society are radically compromised by the fantasy elements; the medical-horrific places the body as a more general feature of the contemporary subject caught up in forces which are beyond control. This conspiracist mode favours a view of social forces which is most satisfying as entertainment when it is least explained. Counter-balancing the attempt to explain the film's events in terms of the subjection of women by men is a mystificatory view relying upon familiar fantasies of reified technological progress; somehow science is proceeding on its own, determining, rather than being determined by, the actions of human beings. In keeping with this, those, like Dr Harris or the nurse at the Institute, appear to be mere slaves to the logic of the machine. Their reptilian indifference to humanity and robotic subservience to the rule of technology and efficiency escapes any attribution of motive to the notion of personal gain. Rather than bodies being plundered for profit and gain, the rewards of the process seem merely to be ploughed back into maintaining the efficiency of the 'system'.

There is a further complication stemming from the same fusion of discourses in Coma, and which renders the issue of emotion (insofar as

it is raised as a dilemma for Susan) highly problematic. The theme is first introduced by Susan's controlled response to the discovery of Nancy's post-operative coma. Choosing to channel her frustrations into an investigation rather than breaking down and displaying an emotional reaction, Susan elicits concern from male colleagues and from Mark. Harris and Mark attempt to explain her investigation as the symptom of irrationality; as a symptom of failing to release her emotions. The suggestion is that she should conform to male expectations and definitions of female character. This is then the basis for a series of encounters in the film which, as Geraghty has argued, emphasize the negative consequences of this:

> 'In Coma,...giving in to emotion spells danger and it almost acts as bait for the men to trap her. Susan is continually criticized by the men in the film for not showing her feelings'.

This is then the basis for creating audience concern:

> 'Whereas normally we gain enjoyment from women in films feeling emotions of love, anger or grief, in Coma at these points, the audience is actually concerned that Susan should not give in to these feelings'.[41]

At one level, this is true; Susan is betrayed at her most vulnerable moments by Mark and by Dr Harris. But there is an ambivalence which resides in Harris's remark that, 'Our emotions are what make us human'. On the one hand, Harris is being manipulative, persuading Susan to co-operate and give in to emotions that will serve her falsely, while he, ironically, is subject to no such feelings. However, it is Harris's lack of emotion which contributes

to his monstrousness and which fail to make him human. Part of the force of the medical-horrific discourse is the fear of de-personalization characterized by the emotionlessness of those associated with conspiracy. The entire core of the film's horror is devoted to personalities robbed of their thoughts and feelings, standing in contrast with the dance class discussed earlier.

We therefore find a set of textual ambiguities arising from the film's implication that it is precisely our emotional life which defines our humanity. Apart from the persistent imagery of depersonalization, there are hints that Susan is taking her repression of emotion too far; one of the male doctors comments - out of her earshot - that he didn't think he could have kept so cool if his friend had been in a coma. It is also interesting to compare the mise-en-scène of Susan's and Mark's apartments. Whereas Mark's is untidy and casual, full of personal touches and with a warm colour scheme, Susan's - where she retreats to a melancholy isolation after the argument - is a modern-sparse and characterless room in a huge office-like building more in keeping with the alienating austerity of the hospital. Our straightforward opposition of Mark and Susan at this point becomes complicated by this proposition that her qualities of independence and emotional control may be being too zealously applied, to the detriment of personal life.

What I have been arguing here is that the influence of the medical-horror discourse in the film is more pervasive and significant than is generally taken into account. The debate which usually attends a discussion of its treatment of the heroine must include some

awareness of the forces exerted by the fantastic aspects of the narrative. To sum up, it is these aspects of the film which create many of the obstructive qualities of its treatment of body politics. First of all, in the collapsing of the specific analysis of the representation of women's bodies into paranoid fantasies of reified technology conspiring to reduce the identity of the contemporary subject. Secondly, by the fears of depersonalization which accompany that vision of society presenting a contradiction of the film's studied attempt to portray Susan as a woman trying to resist stereotypical labels of emotional or hysterical. This leaves a paradox in which to say 'yes' to emotions leaves her a 'typical' woman, while to say 'no' risks association with the technological, the robotic and inhuman. Although it must seem apparent to anyone that the film wishes to use the thriller aspects of its narrative to present a positive image of Susan as an independent woman, both this and the attempt to criticize male definitions of women are radically compromised by an inability to simply co-opt the horrific components of the film. The desire to portray the capacity for action is constantly offset against the sense of being an object and of being powerless or acted upon. This becomes more noticeable towards the end of the film as the narrative increasingly favours horrific disclosures over character study. The climax of the film, triumphant in one sense, is nonetheless diminished by the promotion of such feelings of powerlessness from Susan's point of view on the operating table, and by the necessity of Mark's intervention. The characteristics of the modern horror film's assault upon the body of the subject are all the more readily illuminated by this film which attempts, precisely, to question traditional, patriarchal constraints placed upon the body of woman.

The threat to the female subject of Coma is not typical of Hollywood cinema, since the protagonist is usually male. More typical is the construction of a male subject whose masculinity is specifically threatened. The present obsession with death is no different in the challenge it makes to a subject constructed in terms of masculinity. The following two analyses of The Shining (Stanley Kubrick:1980) and Poltergeist (Tobe Hooper:1982) demonstrate similar configurations where the attack on the male subject that is developed around the ideas of death and ageing, is articulated as a disturbance for patriarchal power and stability. In each film, anxieties based on castration fantasy are linked to the fear of death; this is manifested as theme, image, and as a structure of repetition. A detailed analysis of an individual scene is also given from each film as an example of how this kind of fear is produced and experienced as a direct assault on the spectating subject.

The Shining

The Overlook Hotel is a huge residence deserted in winter but for its janitor. Jack Torrance (Jack Nicholson) takes on the job in order to pursue his failed career as a writer in its seclusion. He takes with him his wife Wendy (Shelley Duvall) and his son Danny (Danny Lloyd) whose capacity to 'Shine' (clairvoyance) is known only to the departing black cook Halloran (Scatman Crothers) who is possessed of similar abilities. Jack's imagination is increasingly dominated by the Hotel's evil forces, and his own potential for patriarchal violence in the home is brought out. The entire narrative is focused on the family as a unit under threat. As such the Hotel comes to suggest certain broad understandings of America as a violent

patriarchy with a guilty past into which Jack is introduced as representative. The film undertakes an exposure of the insecurities which such social situation is based around, locating an especial anxiety in the image of Room 237. Held back from us as an object of mystery, the appalling secret is discussed below as an instance of death's threat to the male ego. As the events take place in the Hotel an increasingly terrified Danny maintains an occas ons contact with Halloran.

In one vivid scene, which we are never privileged to discover the precise level of reality of (Jack denies any experience of the events to his wife), we enter the mysterious Room 237. - Whether the events that occur are the product of Jack's imagination or not, is irrelevant to us here. What is important is that we are invited to participate in the scene's 'reality' and to indulge in its particular fantasy and horror.

We move, via the subjectively emphatic freedom of a Steadicam, through the garishly decorated split-level living space of Room 237. Wide-angle lens and head-height camera mounting increase the sense of participation and a hand appears, 'our' hand, as we enter a luxurious, Art-Deco style bathroom. The room is centred around a bath alcove at the far end which is fitted with a shower curtain. A reverse shot reveals Jack who has an expression of curious determination mixed with apprehension on his face. A series of Shot/Reverse Shot cuts involve the shower curtain being parted by a young woman who leaves the bath and advances towards us/the camera/ Jack, and the slow dawning of desire on Jack's face. We move from a directly subjective position to one which is more generally marked;

we remain at the position in the room which we have arrived at with Jack, but watch as he and the woman embrace in front of the bath in long shot. We cut to an extreme close-up of the two kissing. Jack is superior in frame left, slightly facing us so we can see his eyes. The eyes register some reaction in response to something over the woman's shoulder, a moment of horrific realization, and then we whip-pan r-l to a mirror. In the mirror we see, sharing his point of view, that he/we is holding not an attractive young woman but a disgustingly putrified old woman covered in large areas of ulcerated or rotten flesh. The ominous music, having increased in its discordancy, is broken into by the mocking cackle of the old woman/ corpse (we never find out her exact status) and the previously leisurely pace of the scene preserved in editing, camera-work and actor performance, is disrupted by a series of short intercuts in which we alternate between a number of points of view. There is a basic cross-cutting between a shot of Jack recoiling and retreating from the woman, where we are placed in the position of the woman by a pursuing Steadicam, and a shot of the woman, reversed from Jack's point of view. This diegetically motivated sequence ends with Jack locking the door to the room from out in the corridor where we are returned to a more conventional medium-shot position to Jack's right. The latter enables us to sever our direct experience of the fantasy by subjective camera-work in the same way that Jack shuts it off by locking the door.

Inter-cut with this sequence are three shots each of Danny, Jack's son, who is experiencing the events elsewhere due to his capacity to 'Shine', and who is given a greater degree of close-up

each time, and of a mid-shot of the old woman rising up towards us from our privileged position above the bath. She is slightly more advanced in the movement each time we see her. The shots connect with earlier shots of Danny in terror and of Halloran (Scatman Crothers) the head chef of the Overlook who is 'Shining' in a similarly tormented fashion at home, and with whom the sequence proper may be said to start.

What emerges from these details of the scene's realization, is the persistence of a repetition structure. This, according to Freud, is characteristic of our most fundamental signifying attempts to assuage existential fears of loss. The compulsion to repeat is, in his famous essay, Beyond the Pleasure Principle, approachable through the observation of children's games. The children who alternate the presence and absence of objects as a game are engaging in a play of plenitude and lack that enables the sense of mastery over loss:

> '[T]hey can master a powerful impression far more thoroughly by being active than they could by merely experiencing it passively. Each fresh repetition seems to strengthen the mastery they are in search of'.[42]

In an ironic reading of Freud's account of E.T.A. Hoffman's The Sandman, Elizabeth Wright demonstrates the relevance of the repetition within the text. Freud analyses the story's imagery of dismemberment within the terms of a loss that signifies castration:

> 'Freud's reading subordinates everything to a single thematic motif: the hero's fear of losing his eyes as equivalent to his fear of being deprived of his sexual organ. The threat of castration within the story is seen as actual'.[43]

Crucially, this involves Freud's failure to perceive the significance of a structure of repetition within the text - a repetition that postpones, but culminates in the death of the hero. What is important, for Wright, is that,

> 'what is repeated is not only a content but a structure, a structure of delay, and what is delayed is death. This is a function of the repeated and different scenes of dismemberment, the unscrewing and rescrewing of the child Nathanael's limbs..., the violent death of the father, the tearing apart of the doll, Nathanael's brains dashed out on the pavement. The plot thus performs a detour to death'.[44]

We can avoid Freud's mistake in reducing loss to castration alone, and remaining open to the importance of the ways that death may also share the same kind of discursive strategy. Absence or loss is a negativity denied in our culture's aversion to the countenance of death; the patriarchal basis for castration anxiety must inevitably find its channels of expression confused or condensed with those which articulate our responses to death which remains the ultimate and inescapable castration. Freud notes the tendency for children to play out the disappearance game in a mirror; they play out their attempts to master the fear of death or loss by using the visual sign of their own, ideal, existence.[45]

We can return now to our discussion of The Shining's scene in Room 237 with these observations to heighten our appreciation of the scene's domination by the shock revelations of the mirror. The smoothly self-reassuring cruising of the Steadicam as it glides,

unimpeded and autonomous, through the hotel room constructs for us a pleasure in its freedom and in its wide-angle lens' ability to gather in a large field of details. We are permitted to feel self-possessed and to some extent powerful despite some disqueting sounds from the film's relentless score. Jack's image in reverse shot, which provides our diegetic motivation for being present at this point, is, despite his dishevelled state and weakness of character to date, calm and relatively assertive in his actions. The Whip-pan to the mirror marks the end of this confidence. He reacts and so do we, with horror at the revolting sight in the mirror. The self-confirming pleasure of the ideal image is betrayed and destroyed. Like Dorian Gray's picture our/his self is threatened by what the mirror may show; there is a point at which all mirrors are fated to turn from friends to enemies as they reflect back an image which must increasingly seem alien to our ideals. Our mirrors trace the trajectory of ageing, decrepitude and the eventual promise of death. The ensuing sequence is, structurally, engaging the repetitious attempt to come to terms with death; we oscillate curiously between the subject positions of the recoiling Jack[x] and the threatening crone in a mixture of aggressivity and repulsion, advancing and retreating. More powerfully, we are placed in the privileged and awful position above the image of the old woman emerging from the tub, each time the same, each time slightly more advanced. There is

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[x]The nature of Jack's retreat from the scene and its appalling significance is characterized by stumbling and loss of physical co-ordination. If the initial use of the Steadicam and Jack's confident manner serve to construct the male subject as one in physical control of their relation to the world, then the collapse of this into horror is marked by the destruction of that sense of spatial authority and physical well-being.

a sense of both the static insistence of the repeated event - a compulsion filled with loathing - and of a gradual inexorability through the minute progress of the body in each shot. The sequence is quite frighteningly aggressive in the way it confronts the spectator with such horror, again and again. At the same time our identification with Jack is broken down as we alternate between aggressor and victim in his retreat from the room.

There exists a thematic as well as a structural development of the confrontation between life instincts, or libido, and death. The old woman's state of decay is the advanced and ultimate condition for the other characters who are introduced into the scene and, of course, ourselves by implication. Danny, the boy, is at one end of the scale of life and Halloran, who is old, is at the other. The sequence starts in Halloran's bedroom where we notice two pictures of women, black and white, whose idealized sexuality mocks him from the walls as he lays on the bed watching TV alone: an old man. Jack's identity is in crisis in the film as he fails to come to terms with his inability to make it as a great writer and his approaching middle age. Thus his encounter with the woman is initiated by an affirmation of the ego in sexual terms and ends with its crushing defeat by the recognition of death and decay.[x]

In the same way that Philippe Ariès describes the attempted abolition of death from the twentieth century as it is reflected in the order and quiet regime of the hospital's sterile atmosphere, so

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[x]The attempted immortality of Jack's writing is confirmed in the final shot in which he is seen to be present in a 20's photograph on the wall of the hotel. Some of these ideas have been noted by other writers on the film, e.g. Michel Ciment:Kubrick:London: Collins:1983 and Paul Mayersberg: The Overlook Hotel:Sight & Sound: Winter 1980/81.

too is the Art-Deco bathroom a model of order which, in its regularity, light-green colours and brilliant white lighting, is almost hospital-like. It is an image of obsessive cleanliness which the festering body of the old woman violates as a kind of returning repressed of bathroom and toilet purity. The lighting, which is typical of much of the film's specifically horrific sequences, contributes to the force of the same impulse. We tend to reserve the night or darkness for scenes of horror. It is precisely its association with dreams or the fantastic as opposed to the real that provides a kind of safety-net for our emotions in these cases. Emerging from the cinema into the light of day is often the occasion for a profound sense of relief after a horror film and we feel returned to a realm of the safe and predictable. In this case, however, we are undermined by the adherence to brightness, by the film's delivering its goods in the cold light of an encounter which resists the rapid translation into the realm of fantasy and safety.

This reading of the sequence acknowledges the link between sex and death that provides the underlying dynamic of the breakdown in the construction of the secure and unified self, both in the oscillating point of view system of the sequence and in its violent translation of the sexual into its opposite; death heralded by the bodily corruption of ageing.

Death and its resurfacing into the normality of the American family, is figured in The Shining by the knowledge that the Overlook Hotel is built upon the site of an old Red-Indian burial ground. This is in part an aspect of Kubrick s mysticism which wishes to

appeal to the sense of a more primitive, and perhaps magically or supernaturally attuned, culture than our own which to some extent might be offered as explanatory of the film's happenings. But more generally, and in keeping with the tendencies of the modern horror film, it articulated part of the modern doubt about the ideological and psychological foundations of the home; that it is constructed upon something unpleasant, and that this unpleasantness or source of uncertainty will re-emerge to create trouble or change.[x]

Poltergeist

A film which offers itself as strikingly similar in many general aspects, and which felicitously provides a scene that cries out for comparison with the example from The Shining, is Poltergeist (Tobe Hooper:1982), the power of which derives, it appears to me, from its mixture of Spielbergian middle-class family convictions (he produced and wrote it) with the stark and unsentimental modern Gothicism of Tobe Hooper. Disruption in the film is all the more potent to the extent that the family is established in its comforts, security and apparent harmony; Kubrick's failure to develop his characters beyond the functional and schematic demands of the project makes his breakdown of the family something of a Pyrrhic Victory in comparison.

Poltergeist is a film even more concerned, at an explicit level, with the issue of death and its correlation with disturbances of

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[x]Something which repeatedly vitiates the various attempts to examine The Shining which I have read, is the refusal to discuss Kubrick's work outside of the most idolatrous auteurism - for instance, the extent to which the master has elevated the baser efforts of the pulp-merchant Stephen King, who wrote the novel - and to acknowledge its rapport with, and debt to, other horror films without imagining that Kubrick has produced a film apart.

sexuality. As with The Shining we are given an image of a household which is predicated upon the attempted denial of death; it is constructed, with the rest of the estate, upon a graveyard which has been cosmetically concealed to make a profit without having to remove the bodies. The forces which surface from below the imitation Gothic home are developed both in relation to the cultural banishment of death and to the social construction of female sexuality, each being implicitly linked to the profit-making ethic. Before delivering an analysis of the 'face tearing' scene, it is worth looking at the way that anxiety about death and sexuality in the film is generally established.

Poltergeist's story concerns the chaotic events which befall an American family when a poltergeist takes over their home and 'kidnaps' the youngest child, a little girl (Carol-Anne). Most of the film consists of attempts to reclaim the child from the limbo into which she has been taken and the narrative provides the basis for a debate, as it were, in which the struggle over the child is the dramatic mainspring for an ideological battle between competing definitions of sexuality. The threat of non-patriarchal sexuality is compounded with death anxiety in a way that allows the disturbances focused around the loss of Carol-Anne to emerge as a concerted destabilization of the ideological foundations of the middle-class American home as it is established in the film by the life-style of the Freeling family. The Freelings comprise: Steve (Craig Nelson), the father whose real-estate salesmanship has contributed to the success of the Cuesta Verde estate in which they live, Diane (Jobeth Williams) the mother who is a full-time housewife, Dana (Dominique Dunne), a girl in her teens whose developing interest in the opposite sex goes some way to implicitly

explaining her relative lack of presence in the home for much of the film, Robbie (Oliver Robins), an unremarkable boy of seven and Carol-Anne (Heather O'Rourke) who is five.

The relative ages are significant since the narrative organizes its thematic treatment of death and sexuality whthin the framework of the developmental schema afforded by the family; their particular configuration of ages and sexes allows us to see something of the way in which certain kinds of pressure and anxiety are generated in relation to the dominant models of social role construction within the home when the resistances and alternatives to that order are given ascendancy, metaphorically, through their association with the domestic turmoil wreaked by the activities of the poltergeist. In some ways the film recalls a characteristically Spielbergian concern with domestic tension in the middle-class home which circulates around the feared loss of paternal control (e.g. Jaws (1975), Close Encounters of the Third Kind (1977) and E.T. (1982) which articulate fears of incapable, distracted and absent fathers, respectively). But, to counteract the reductiveness of taking this as the most fruitful critical path (see, for instance, Douglas Kellner's article Suburban Ideology:(Jump Cut. No.28, pp.5-6), which after admitting that the film is a 'collective enterprise' and that 'In fact, the film offers an amalgam of the cinematic styles and philosophies of Hooper and Spielberg', goes on, perversely, to declare that 'there are enough Spielbergian elements in it to justify analysis of the film in terms of Spielberg's ideological problematic'. The film is equally recognizable, if not more so, for the broader cultural assumptions which it exploits about sexuality and death which, while

they may be in some measure the product of a familiar strand in Hooper's repertoire,[x] are best understood as part of something more widespread than can be offered by 'auteurist' exegeses.

At one level, children are represented as a general source of disturbance for the adult world. This provides much of the film's gentle humour which elegantly utilizes the irony that attends the 'out of the mouths of babes' principle. An early scene provides a clear example. Steve and some male friends are gathered at the Freeling home to watch a football game on TV. An unfit member of the group arrives on the scene riding a child's bike which is too small for him. He is struggling and sweating with a case of beer under his arm and appears as a ludicrous and cumbersome figure, an object of fun. As he approaches the house, he is tripped off his bike by children who cross the path of his wheel with their remote-controlled toy cars. Awkward and out of breath, he enters the house with beer squirting everywhere. The absurd image of the adult is continued as the men shout and cheer as if possessed while watching the game and spilling beer in all directions. The game is disrupted by the unwanted changing over of TV channels caused by next-door's remote device which operates on the same frequency. In this instance it is due to the desires of the neighbour's children who want to watch their own choice. Thus the opposed desires of the young are signalled by the repeated interruption of the adults' football programme with images of the children's programme presenter.

The events are further inflected to establish the world disrupted, as one defined by a division of labour and differing social

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[x]For instance, the Saturnine references in The Texas Chainsaw Massacre (1975) or the Thanatological interests of Lifeforce (1985).

identities for men and women. Upstairs, Diana is cleaning the children's bedroom - women's work - while downstairs, the men are indulging themselves in the pleasures of male cameraderie and sports machismo. The shadow of childhood opposition to each of these parental rhythms is cast by the disruption of the men's game on the one hand, and by Diana's small cry of pain as she steps on one of the children's toys. The latter accident leads into Diana's noticing that Carol-Anne's pet canary has died. This seemingly trivial and humorously exploited event is the first major attempt to develop a discourse which appears to be informed by the denial of castration, and a refusal to accept the idea of death.

Death is unpleasant. It is frequently associated with and signified by that which inevitably accompanies it as a condition: physical decay. We have earlier seen how Ariès is concerned to relate the modern fear of death to the twentieth century western abolition of its physical signs; we are avoiding general exposure to the unpleasantness of the idea of death as much as we are hoping to cheat it when we hospitalize the sick, especially with terminally ill patients. Yet, it is signified everywhere by its absence, in its denial by asepsis. In context, the emphasis upon cleanliness, the new and the youthful in much of our culture is, in part, an attempt to avoid or deny death by a banishment of its signifiers.

The dead canary, too, is unpleasant then, and Diana attempts to dispose of its corpse. The dead animal violates the order of the bright and spotless bathroom as Diana proceeds in mock ceremony towards the toilet bowl with the offensive bird held out at arm's

length. The foregrounded ritual is arrested by the arrival of Carol-Anne whose intake of breath punctuates the proceedings. For the child, death is an unknown which has yet to be negotiated. They are then obliged to perform a small service for the bird on Carol-Anne's behalf; it is buried outside in the garden in a cigar box with a little prayer performed by Carol-Anne. A number of contributions from the others present contrive to effect a wry subversion of the traditional solemnity and sanctity of western burial practices: Dana expresses disgust at the sentimentality of Carol-Anne's prayer, Robbie asks if he might dig it up to look at the bones when it rots and the family pet dog begins to dig for it as soon as the ceremony is completed. The dog is associated with the realm of the natural in the film, a paradigmatic chain which extends to Carol-Anne's extra-patriarchal status, aspects of the poltergeist itself, and significantly involves the emphasis placed upon the tree as we shall see.

Thus the scene constructs a defiant gesture towards the conventions of the adult world in respect of death. The final deflating blow is when Carol-Anne, in big close-up for emphasis, and beaming hugely, asks Diana if she can now have a goldfish. The whole performance now appears as the rehearsal of a practice which is essentially without real meaning for the child; rather, it is a kind of adult game which Carol-Anne has complied with. The indication of a refusal to accept the idea of death is implicit in her concern that the canary might earlier have been able to detect the unpleasant odour issuing from its body and insisting upon placing sweet-smelling items in the cigar box.[46]

Following this, is a scene from an old Spencer Tracy film (A Guy Named Joe:Victor Fleming:1944) which the parents are watching on TV in the bedroom. It is one of those fairly popular films of the forties geared to reassuring a war-stricken nation that death might not be the last word on things by depicting heaven and the afterlife as a cloud-based version of normality. One aspect is that these films also contain a moral message in the reassurance of justice from beyond the present life. What makes for considerable interest here is the fact that in this particular film the storyline involves a flier who finds he has died and gone to heaven. He returns as a ghost to keep an eye on the relationship between his ex-girlfriend and her new partner. This narrative affirmation of the power of the Law of the father to extend beyond the grave is 'quoted' in the film as the father, Steve, is lying on the bed reading Reagan : The Man, The President. The masculine authoritarianism implied in the latter invites us to see Steve as, to some extent, the conduit for the attempt to restore a patriarchal order in the spiritual and temporal domains of the film.

To some degree, we can observe in the comic features of this scene, the seeds of the anxieties which inform such a fantasy of male insecurity; notably it is suggested when Steve pretends to be performing a high-dive from the bed. The days when he may have been able to indulge in such sports are probably gone and Steve mocks the image of his sagging body with its middle-age spread by standing in front of the mirror and, while alternately exaggerating and contracting his paunch, jokes to Diana: 'Before, After, Before, After...' The assault of age upon the Imaginary, the mirror's evidence against

the security of the specular ego and the life instincts are manifest once again by their organization around the repetition compulsion at the heart of Steve's play.

The destabilization of the Symbolic Order in the film finds its personal locus here. Steve lives a highly conventional lifestyle in many ways; he is a real-estate salesman, lives in a well-equipped home full of consumer durables, dresses in an unspectacular manner, watches football with the guys...And yet, there is a sense in which the Reaganist references may point to the appeal of a certain reactionary reassertiveness typical of the new Moral Majority in the US. Perhaps selling houses in a glib, if skillful, manner is not a man's work? The moderate liberalism which attends the Freelings' casual dope smoking may imply the decline of an old male authoritarianism; the shot of Diana smoking a joint and Steve reading his Reagan biography while lounging on the bed raises these issues in a situation which has traditionally been defined by an ideology of male domination. The loss of such an authoritarianism is also present, later on, when we hear Steve react indignantly to the suggestion that he should threaten Carol-Anne with physical violence as part of the attempt to prevent her succumbing further to the embraces of the poltergeist: he declares that he has never raised a hand against her before. 'Maybe', the film is asking, 'Steve is losing his masculine authority?'

The fear of female sexuality outside of patriarchal definitions is most powerfully represented in the film by an extraordinarily well-developed system of images which are dynamized by castration anxiety.

The ultimately castrated and powerless condition of death and the physical and symbolic lack evoked by woman's sexuality are mutually informing apprehensions which repeatedly surface in Poltergeist through the doubly-articulative image of the hole or void.[x]

The first shot in the film, and one which recurs on several occasions, is that of the television screen, blank except for static after the last bars of the National anthem have played out to the accompaniment of a montage of images meant to sum up the dominant values of America: the Lincoln memorial, the Whitehouse and, importantly, the reconstruction of the marines erecting the American flag on Iwo Juma. This last icon of masculine idealism is abruptly replaced after the anthem by the hissing and static of televisual nothingness and it is from this post-patriarchal nothingness, this void, that the poltergeist will emerge in all its associations with Carol-Anne. It is to this blank screen that the child is drawn at night, while the others sleep and only the dog, natural, sensitive and attuned to things outside the range of human rhythms, prowls around. This same pattern of meanings and associations is played on in an amusing way later on when, on finding Carol-Anne to be staring intently and hopefully at the untuned station on the television in the kitchen, Diana tells her she will ruin her eyes and switches the set randomly to a programme. Ironically, it is a war film with immediate scenes of WW2 soldiers blasting away at each other in rhyming reference to the Iwo Juma shot. When Carol-Anne is finally taken by the poltergeist, it is on a blank, untuned - and implicitly socially unmodified and defined - channel that she is able to be heard.

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[x]For the Freudian explanation of castration anxiety and its relation to patriarchal family structure see The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex in On Sexuality.[47]

Nocturnal visits to the TV, Carol-Anne's somnambulism, are a cause of considerable worry in her mother. The first term of a special link between the two is evident here as Diana apparently used to do the same. This fear is played out in yet another fantasy of castration by Diana's specific worry that Carol-Anne will fall into the new pool being excavated in the garden and which is unfilled with water. This configuation of the void, now half-filled with rainwater, is frantically examined when the little girl is first claimed by the poltergeist. At the end of the film, after much verbal exposition by the para-psychologist about the possibility of dead souls being unaware of their deaths - another denial of death - we have learned that the whole of Cuesta Verde and the Freeling home is constructed throughout the film by images of the void and pit, now emerges more forcefully both as a notion repressed by the whole way of life enjoyed by the Freelings - as something which their home is physically concealing - and more dramatically in its full and horrific return. This provides the spectacular finale with its tremendous emotional charge. Coffins laden with long-decayed corpses spew forth their ghastly contents into the Freelings' house. Soil and human matter erupt through the pristine territory of the house, bursting through tiled floors to block the paths of the terrified occupants. The 'return of the dead' sequence is initiated by Diana's falling into the dreaded pool, combining ideas of death, the void, filth and powerlessness as she helplessly tries to evade the surfacing bodies by vainly crawling up the mud-greased banks only to slide back into the corpse-filled swamp. This sequence ends with the literal folding up and disappearance of the house itself.

These horrific articulations of death anxiety are, as I have stressed, compounded with a discourse that implicates their effectivity with co-extensively developed male fears about female sexuality. Thus there is a number of ways that the film's horrific elements are deployed in deference to conceptions of sexual difference. What emerges is an often ambiguous mixture of assaults upon and reassertions of dominant patriarchal definitions of female sexuality which it is tempting to attribute, in part at least, to the clash of sensibilities of producer/writer Spielberg and director Hooper, but which is in reality more likely to be generated by the inherent difficulties of adapting the raw material of contemporary horror; that is, it seems improbable that we can produce a horror film (and I wish to emphasize the difference between genuinely harrowing experiences and the mere inclusion and deployment of generic machinery like the monster) that is both truly horrific and affirmative of 'progressive' values throughout its entire project. Rather, I would wish to defend the value of the knowledge produced in perceiving the kind of conflicts in films like Poltergeist, in experiencing the clash of interests and emotions delivered by the contest between the different ideological/ semiotic systems (as we have seen with Coma).

The spectrum of female representations in the film offers a number of variants upon the unifying theme of threatened male security, seen ultimately as a threat to the status quo of the home and family. Dana's independence from the family is, as I have briefly mentioned, generally marked by her relative absence from the home and the supernatural turmoil, or by her sequestration in her bedroom with the phone. This independence is given an aggressive sexual colouration

in the scene where she responds to the collective and conspiratorial leering of the workers who are digging the new pool with a mocking and vigorously emphatic 'Up your's!' gesture.

The problem of independent women is picked up by the para-psychologist, a self-possessed lady of, perhaps, fiftyish who commands two male aides, drinks whisky from a hip-flask and describes herself at one moment as 'the most irresponsible woman of my age I know'. She develops a strong and sympathetic relationship with Diana, sharing whisky and confidences and being in general more accessible than her male assistants who receive the events with a sceptical male rationalism, busying themselves constantly with equipment, preoccupying themselves with the passion for quantification and measurement and alienating themselves behind a wall of para-psychological jargon - a kind of 'Haig-speak' of the para-normal. At times, it seems that the chief 'scare' of the film is that of losing Diana, as it were, to the clutches of the film's non-patriarchal discourses; there is more sense to be made from the major discursive conflicts in the film if we understand the struggle to regain possession of Carol-Anne as simultaneously the surfacing of an anxiety about the possible dissolution of traditional family relationships which would appear to circulate around the kind of competing notions of sexual identity with which we are by now reasonably familiar.

This is the explanation for the two-fold nature of the poltergeist itself which the film, to its aesthetic detriment, allocates a rather excessive amount of time to the explanation of; it consists mainly of lengthy verbal attempts to define it in what emerges as fairly oblique

allusions to lights, forces, souls unaware of the fact of their death, different worlds, unhappiness, betrayal and so forth. There is so much of this metaphysics from the para-psychologist and the clairvoyant that the relatively minimal yields brought by its full examination weigh against the value of undertaking one here. One specific reference is of interest here, however. The para-psychologist, on confessing her professional inadequacy in the face of the forces in the house, says to Diana that: 'I felt like the proto-human coming out of the "forest primeval" and seeing the moon for the first time and throwing rocks at it'. Two elements of this statement offer quite precise references to other narratives and fictions with similar interest. Firstly, there is the quotation from Longfellow's poem Evangeline whose famous first lines commence with 'This is the forest primeval...' and which follows the ruination of idyllic Acadian life in Canada and the tragic separation of two romantically idealized lovers, Evangeline and Gabriel. The conclusion of the narrative's quest to reconcile the two, ends bathetically as Evangeline discovers Gabriel at long last, only to be confronted by an old and dying man. The poem is insistent in its imagery of ageing and its denial of the same: 'Into her thoughts of him time entered not' but death is destined to emerge finally. Even then there is an attempt to disavow it as the couple see, briefly, the image of their former partner's youth. This allusion is keyed in to the film's identical fears of spoiled ideals, separation and, finally, death.

The other reference is the association of the force in the house with the moon, thus linking its power, by association with the film's Diana, to the image of the huntress Diana - moon goddess and predator.

Through the images of the primeval and the natural, the narrative establishes a special bond between Diana and Carol-Anne, a mother/daughter relation which expresses something shared that is outside the regime of male understanding. Indeed, is not to be understood in rationalist terms at all. For instance, there is the scene where the force of Carol-Anne transmigrates upstairs, sweeping over Diana in the process. The mother is emotionally overwhelmed as she experiences her daughter's soul passing through her (sic). She is able to identify the child by the smell of her which remains behind. It is an elated moment with, despite its mysticism, considerable force in the film and is one instance in which the more positive side of the film's argument emerges in a dominant fashion, being filmed in an uncritical and celebratory treatment of the mother's reunion with her 'baby'. The early and unique bond of mother and baby is extended in the moment of rebirth in the film when the two of them return from the 'other' world of the poltergeist like a slime-covered Madonna and child with Carol-Anne in a more or less foetal position and with both of them being brought into life again and being encouraged, like babies, to begin breathing.

The tree functions as an image of the natural which is developed in relation to the little girl and to things beyond the control or understanding of society. The head of Carol-Anne's bed is wrought with tree-like patterns and her hair provides a suggestion of this shape when blown out by the force of the poltergeist at times. It is the tree which is given as a specific threat to the little boy, Robbie. First of all, he is told of its age and wisdom and of its existence prior to the establishment of the community in which they dwell. When

his fears are confirmed by the tree's attack upon him (and significantly on Steve who goes to help rescue him) it is within the pattern of castration imagery that they are figured. The tree tries to engulf him and swallow him whole and the whole thing eventually disappears into the massive vortex of the storm's tornado. The central architectural feature of the Freeling home's interior is the curving stairway which is allowed to dominate the composition of many shots and scenes. In dream imagery this is frequently a coded articulation for sexual activity[x] and this is implicitly applied to the activities surrounding the poltergeist and its sequestration of the girl upstairs. The movement of the stairs is echoed in the shape of a long, twisted houseplant or tree which is extending up the side of the wall from below to upstairs inside the house. There is a more explicit connection between these images and female sexuality in the final scenes of mayhem, when the monstrous forms of the poltergeist start to appear and what eventually develops into a grotesque and pulsating vaginal tunnel which threatens to engulf Diana and the children is heralded by the appearance, around the door-frame, of tendrils which are evocative of both trees and pubic hair.[48]

Although the two aspects of the poltergeist remain somewhat unclear from the verbal attempts to characterize them, there are moments where the sense of conflicting values emerges in a suggestive way. The rebirth scene where mother and daughter are reclaimed is especially illuminating in this respect since it marks a kind of transition point in the narrative where patriarchal values begin to reassert themselves and where the feminine features of the

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[x]For further exploration of this image see the following analysis of the 'face-tearing scene'.

poltergeist develop monstrous or grotesque qualities.

The struggle in the narrative is generally pointed up by the drama over whether Carol-Anne should be moving towards or away from the light which comprises half of the poltergeist's presence. Confusion enters for the Freelings when the clairvoyant lady suddenly changes her position and starts to order the child towards the light. The light is more or less implied to be part of the repressed home '...not part of consciousness as we know it...' and is firmly associated with the little girl - for instance in the drawing which the male para-psychologist doodles, consisting of Carol-Anne's head below the ascending staircase which leads up to the light's rays - as it is also associated with forces which are a threat to adults...'to us it is the beast'. The force as it is figured as the unconscious and repressed values of female sexuality is thus given some threatening qualities and it is these threats which the film starts to try and quell at this moment. For example, the rescue is firmly punctuated by the heavily romantic exchange with Steve and Diana in which they embrace in front of the light and Steve, appearing forceful for the first time since the events commenced, swears he will never let go of the rope by which he is to maintain physical and metaphorical control over his wife. He is also able to countermand the authority of the clairvoyant when she orders the child into the light.

The extraordinary representation of the clairvoyant deserves some explanation here, for it is as a source of coded disquiet, in tune with the film's central themes of male insecurity, that her

adversary role to Steve acquires its significance. Her physical appearance expresses confusions and anxieties connected with definitions of sexuality and death or ageing in the film. Initially, it is the diminutive height of the clairvoyant which stands out. Coupled with the peculiarly high-pitched Southern accent it contributes to a signification of the child-like. Yet, she is in fact quite elderly, possibly of pensionable years. So a blurring exists, in her representation, of the distinctions of the youthful and the aged, of the traces of Eros and Thanatos. On top of this, she is butch with austere lesbian connotations, rejecting heterosexuality and patriarchal formations of pleasure, yet refuses typical 'punishment' or categorization which might render her 'safe'. Instead, she is by turns sympathetic and authoritative, presiding over the events of the reclamation scene and unnerving Steve by reading his thoughts. After the mother and daughter have been successfully returned to the family and a kind of primordial nuclear unit is evoked by the slime-covered reunion in the bathroom, there is a curious and self-conscious moment in which the medium shuts the door upon the Freelings and we join her outside as she celebrates the occasion in her own way. It is a peculiar instance for the way in which it partially deflates the apparent resolution of the film's major tension; Carol-Anne is restored, the poltergeist expunged and the family reinstated. Rather than witnessing the extended elation of the Freelings, we are treated to a strangely theatrical response from the medium who congratulates her own achievement with a kind of parodic Hollywood sex-symbol performance to the para-psychologist's video-camera. The insecurities which the character dramatizes are reinvoked as this unglamorous and plain, old and implicitly lesbian figure challenges

the camera with this untrammelled statement and assertion of her sexual identity in mocking imitation of a pose generally reserved for conventionally patriarchal and voyeuristic pleasure production.

It is this point at which the film takes a pause before developing a finale which sees the collapse of the Freeling home. All is calm and well the next day as the family prepare to leave the house and its past horrors for good. But there are reminders of the film's tensions quietly articulated among the apparently innocuous details of the scene. Earlier in the narrative we noticed the establishment of the subversion of adult routines or pleasures by the intrusion of elements belonging to a children's discourse and here, again, we see Steve trip awkwardly over the children's bicycle as he moves some of their belongings. The ideas which have connected the turbulence in the home with the re-emergence of death and female sexuality are invoked again by the change in Diana's hair. She now sports white streaks in her hair which recall the 'vamp' look of Elsa Lanchester in Bride of Frankenstein (James Whale:1935) or Yvonne de Carlo in The Munsters and which signifies a certain necrophilial fascination uniting these elements. What it indicates in the narrative is the transmission of concern about female sexuality (and the threat to masculine identity) to Diana as well as Carol-Anne. Consequently, the final ensuing drama can be best understood as a kind of supernatural combat between masculine and feminine discourses where the film's more reactionary impulses begin to regroup.

It has already been hinted that, of the erupting forces in the home, there may be a masculine component: in the 'rebirth' sequence there occurs a shot in which we witness Steve recoiling in open-mouthed terror from an enormous, roaring head of a monstrous nature that looms aggressively at him. There is in the diametricality of the composition and in the parallelling of expressions a kind of mirroring effect that goes some way to providing an explanation of the poltergeist as, in part, patriarchal (I have mentioned the earlier attempts in the film to explain its multiple determination in metaphysical terms). The film's coda activates many of the central themes and metaphors in what emerges as an ascendancy of the discourse of castration anxiety and revulsion.

What happens is only partially the result of a construction of a triumphant masculinity in terms of a 'positive' phallic assertiveness; there is no real sense of a St. George quelling this particular dragon; Steve's physical determination over the events is minimal and scarcely more composed than any of the others and his relation to the activities of the monster is not significantly marked as far as I am able to tell. Instead, we are given a treatment which emphasizes the feminine qualities of the poltergeist as grotesque, creating a wholly negative image which threatens the mother and her children. The process starts with Diana's bath. Death's association with the unclean, and its denial through hygeine resurfaces in the sense of purification in the ritual; the bath is a soothing and cleansing ritual taken in the knowledge (false) that the poltergeist is gone. But the film's horrific discourse is immediately reintroduced by the vorticial image of the bath's plughole emphasized by the camera. One is significantly reminded of the notorious predecessors of this complex

to be found in Psycho (Alfred Hitchcock:1960) and Shivers. The shower and bath scenes in the two films, respectively, draw upon the association of hole imagery with women who are to be punished (killed) in a suggestively phallic-aggressive manner. In the former, Marion Crane is repeatedly stabbed in the shower in the famous sequence which articulates its voyeuristic fascination across a startling series of images that centre around the circle or hole and which also maintain the pure/impure tension. These include the spyhole in the wall, the eyes of both Norman and Marion, the flushing toilet bowl, the shower-head, the close-up of Marion's mouth and navel. Marion's death is covered up by the frantic attempt to eliminate the unclean residues of her blood. We are given extended views of the blood being swirled or flushed down the drains of the shower/bath, Norman washing his hands in the sink, close-ups of the blood-soaked hole of the bucket he uses to clean up with and, finally, the slow engulfment in the vortex of the quicksand of the car containing Marion's remains. The complex of male anxiety which funds this chain of images: female sexuality/castration/death/unclean is reinvoked in the final image of the film as the close-up of Norman's face is superimposed with the grimace of his mother's desiccated death-mask and finally dissolves to a close-up of the car being exhumed from the quicksand, a return of the denied discourse. Similarly, in Shivers we find, although subject to some inversion, what amounts to a kind of affective anagram of the same complex of associations as a woman, relaxing sensuously in her bath, is 'raped' by the phallic/excremental parasite which emerges from the bath's plughole.

It is within this pattern of ideas that we can understand the 'bath before the storm' status of the scene with Diana and can note the importance, in retrospect, of the medium's pronouncement after supposedly eliminating the poltergeist: 'This house is clean!' This proves, of course, not to be the case literally and figuratively as the narrative contests the state of grace achieved by the mother and daughter outside of patriarchal discourses. It is prefigured by the two children, Carol-Anne and Robbie, squabbling on the bed over a toy and which ends with Robbie energetically zapping Carol-Anne with a toy gun. From the modestly-articulated ideas of masculine aggression which lie behind this image, we move to Diana relaxing on her bed after the bath where the touble begins again by a powerful and grotesque assault by an invisible force which, in the way it forces Diana's clothes upwards to reveal her underwear and causes her to thrash around on the bed, constitutes a metaphorical rape which we are unfortunately invited to relish from our superior and privileged camera placement that allows us to share the poltergeist's rather than Diana's experience. Following the rape, Diana attempts to reach the children by running along the corridor where she is subjected to the 'vertigo effect' of combined tracking-out and zooming-in which turns the corridor into what appears to be an ever-receding tunnel and seeming to hold Diana, impotently, in one place and unable to reach the kids. This process was first developed in Hitchcock's Vertigo (1958) which manifests an almost pathological obsession with asserting masculine definitions of female sexuality to combat castration anxiety. It has become something of a trademark of Spielberg of late and in this case might be usefully compared with the shot of Roy Scheider in his deckchair in Jaws, another film which

defends the family against a monster with strong and predatory sexual associations, where he believes the children are jeopardized by the shark. Again, this trick is used to show a subjective impression of Chief Brody's state of mind with the vertigenous alienation of the character from his background. Diana is repeatedly subjected to a gauntlet of horrors, from the slop-filled pool of corpses to the coffins erupting from the floor of the home and centring around the monstrous image of the vagina which the monster appears as. A vagina with a long tongue in fact, evocative of the phallic woman. Women especially are threatened in the end of Poltergeist by the monstrous spectre of their own genitalia. At this point, Dana is singled out when, after being dropped off by a date in a red sports car, she finds herself amid the turmoil. We track in on her rapidly as she screams 'What's happening' and launches into hysterics. Finally, the entire house is annihilated as it folds up into yet another vortex and disappears altogether. As the Freelings drive away, presumably never to return, the filth of the events is removed by a final purification image of rain flowing over the wind-screen of the car and indeed onto the TV which Steve evicts from the motel.

This relatively lengthy examination of Poltergeist seemed to me necessary to establish the extent of the detail in which male insecurities are inflected across paradigmatic chains of association which connect death, castration, decay and female sexuality and to thus provide a context for my consideration of the 'face tearing' scene which might otherwise seem unjustified.

In the sequence in which it occurs, one of the two male parapsychologists, goes to the kitchen in order to relieve his hunger while he and his companion are performing a night vigil at the closed-circuit video monitor. In the kitchen, he removes a chop or steak from the refrigerator and puts it on the breakfast bar as he places a chicken leg in his mouth. As his back is turned, noises alert him to the chop which is now moving of its own volition across the bar. The eruption of the raw chop into a kind of rotting mince causes him to spit out the chicken joint in revulsion, only to discover that it, too, is now covered in maggots as it lies on the kitchen floor. Rushing to the sink in the bathroom next door, he is sick into the sink. As he looks into the mirror, the lights begin to alternate in intensity and colour as he notices a blemish of some kind on his face. Probing of the mark, results in pieces of face coming away and dripping into the sink. Despite obvious panic and disgust, he is compelled to keep plucking and tearing at his face until, just as he have reached a point at which the skull itself is exposed, everything returns to normal in an abrupt flash.

The formal qualities of the sequence, and of the actual face-tearing in particular, conform with the kind of concerns which are to be located in the bathroom scene from The Shining: a fear of death and ageing, of a physical mortality that is also produced as co-extensive with a discourse of active female sexuality resulting finally in what is predominantly masculine subjectivity being threatened or disturbed.

The sequence is established initially in a generalized manner; through close-ups of the Freelings asleep in their living room and the invasive connotations of the slow zoom-in of the house from outside in the road at night, the threat of the void in the frame-filling opening shot of the sequence of the TV screen and static is extended to form an assault upon the institutions of the home and family. The horrific events which follow are illustrative of the masculine insecurities which inform this imaginary sense of threat.

As the para-psychologist informs his partner that he is going to get some food, we are introduced by a pan l-r in close-up to the sketch he has been idly amusing himself with. It is a picture of Carol-Anne's head dominating the foreground, behind which rises the winding staircase leading up to a spectacular source of light or energy. Freud's dream studies have revealed a consistent use of the figure of the staircase to function as sexual activity: 'Steps, ladders or staircases, or, as the case may be, walking up or down them, are representations of the sexual act'. (The Interpretation of Dreams,[49] see also A Staircase Dream, reported by Otto Rank. Ibid.). Following this, the diagram offers a highly schematized account of Carol-Anne's problematic status for the men, being straightforwardly associated here with uncontrollable and dangerously hostile sexual energy and activity. This concern, then, is indicated as explanatory of the appalling experience which ensues.

The events that follow are characterized by the disruption or violation of a number of codes through which an initial state of security and calm is established. This is accomplished in

conjunction with the creation of an intimate spatial association with the main character through an adherence to close-ups with a hand-held camera until, as in the scene from The Shining, we are given direct point-of-view shots to share revulsion at the moments of the scene's greatest impact. At first, the soundtrack is relatively quiet except for a few odd night-time noises, and is dominated by the sounds of the para-psychologist gobbling mouthfuls of 'Cheetahs' from a packet. The food is emphasized in Big Close-Up. The late night foray into the kitchen in search of food is a common enough source of pleasure for most people at one time or another, and we share the experience of the character with tight hand-held shots as we go into the kitchen to raid the fridge. The room is clean and tiled, quiet and calm with its soothing darkness broken only by the tempting light that emanates from the open refrigerator door which Marty has opened. There is a certain reassuring orality in the act of eating - depressed people often resort to it in excess - and the emphasis upon food and eating is at first part of a comforting respite which the scene helps to provide after the more distressing events of the poltergeist's arrival. Marty's - and our - indulgence is shattered, however, as the soundtrack registers a kind of intrusive slurping noise. We move in very tight framing with his head, noting the prominence of the chicken leg in the mouth, and with Marty's head in Close-Up, we take in, in reverse shot, the steak or chop he has placed on the breakfast bar which is slowly moving. A sequence of shots/reverse shots between Marty's face in Big Close-Up and the meat in Close-Up emphasize the chicken in his mouth again, and cause the revulsion he/we experience at the now erupting-decaying meat to resonate in terms of personal contact with decay. This is

extended further when we are treated to a direct point-of-view shot of the chicken leg he spits out on the kitchen floor, and which is seen to be crawling with maggots. In consonance with the theme of filth/decay v. cleanliness/hygeine which occurs throughout the film, the two pieces of meat are exaggerated in their image of the impure or unclean by their respective violations of the aseptic tiled surfaces of the breakfast bar and the kitchen floor. This particular disgust of decaying matter is then transferred to the central and most disturbing feature of the scene; the coming apart of Marty's face.

Death returns in the scene with the suggested associations of decay and in the central assault upon the ego's physical confirmation of its existence and desire for immortality. Just as the generally reassuring tenor of the scene is destroyed by the corruption of the food; the increasing stridency and dissonance of the soundtrack's mixture of music with the sounds of facial tissue slopping and dripping into the sink; the latter's violation of the sink's pristine whiteness and pollution of the running water which is elsewhere marked as an image of purification;[x] the movement from the comforting, subdued lighting of the kitchen to the harsher glare of the washroom and the poltergeist-induced oscillations of coloured light - so too does the construction of the spectating subject move from a general to a direct and specific alignment whth the horrors which Marty is experiencing. The scene's impact becomes one of a direct assault upon the specular ego of the viewer for, after Marty has glanced up to the changing light overhead - an act we participate in with a vertical pan - we

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[x]One should note the insistence of the plughole and its repetitious image in the 'face tearing' sequence, in the light of the relations it forms with images of the hole or the void discussed earlier.

cut to a shot of the mirror in close-up in a virtually direct assumption of his point-of-view. From then on, we are given an alternating series of shots between the face in the mirror and the matter in the sink which accelerates in tempo. The compulsion to repeat orchestrates the whole series as Marty's mirror image tears away at its face with mounting frenzy despite the self-destructive nature of the act. The repetition structure is obsessively present in the editing; seventeen shots in a row are alternations of an increasingly destroyed face and tissue-splattered sink until normality is reinstated with a flash cut to the image of his previous condition in the mirror. There are then two cuts, to the sink in spotless and pure condition with running water, and back to the normal mirror image at which point we leave Marty's direct subjectivity by panning r-l from the mirror to his face in close-up. End of scene.

The major thrust of Poltergeist is quite clearly focused on the feared collapse of American values contained in the image of the Freeling family and their lifestyle represented in the film. Since a fundamental organizing principle of this mode of existence is patriarchy then,as with so many other films within the same generic space and of the same time, we may be less than astonished to find that there is (taking account of the voluminous literature dealing with cinematic voyerism and the construction of the subject as male) a corresponding disruption of the security of the spectator position. Indeed, in the above example, there is an untrammelled aggressivity to the viewer in the spectacular collapse of the Imaginary figure of identification. What is singularly interesting is the light shed upon the nature of the collapse. That is, the emphasis upon personal

physical destruction and decay in the film is, as I believe I have clearly demonstrated, part of a simultaneously articulated fear of death and female sexuality that is in large part informed by the kind of castration anxiety mobilized by the polysemy of the hole or void. The threat which death represents to the Imaginary is, however, something which is not exhausted by its integration with the 'problem of woman'. The experience of death and its presence throughout the film carries an affective power, develops and persists with a set of concerns, that to me do not allow a useful comparison with any other film which may attempt to restore patriarchal confidence and dominance, simply on the grounds that they share an overall negativity in their depiction of female sexuality. While accepting the need to be concerned about this issue, it should not prevent our being alerted to the general perception of death in society and the possibility that the film's affective power draws upon its pervasion of the film's sexual discourses through a mixture of theme, image and formal patterns of repetition. We can now move on, in Chapter Five to consider some general propositions on the shift in the construction of the horrific subject by contrasting its dualistic form in Howard Hawks's The Thing from Another World (1951), with its fragmentation in John Carpenter's remake of 1982: The Thing. From this we can establish the emergence of a horror film generated within the horrific potentiality of a post-modern sensibility, going on to consider its treatment of the body in The Fly (1986), The Terminator (James Cameron:1984) and RoboCop (Paul Verhoeven:1987).

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CHAPTER FIVE

POSTMODERNISM AND THE HORRIFIC SUBJECT

In Coma, the body is under assault. It has come to represent the contemporary self perceived in its most non-transcendent and physical sense. A heightened awareness of mortality in our culture feeds into fantasies of technological take-over to produce visions of human identity demolished by an unstoppable process of rationalism. Coma's achievement is in its attempt to resist this through the introduction of a political discourse devoted to emphasizing the validity of Susan Wheeler's feminine identity, and attempting to characterize the negative forces in the film's narrative as patriarchal and socially constructed, rather than idiopathically evil or technologically conspiracist. This kind of resistance is made possible by the maintenance, however imperilled, of a subjectivity more or less certain of its social identity. If Susan Wheeler's social and sexual status is the source of the film's struggle, it is a struggle made possible by the tenability of that identity in a world capable of accepting analysis and change. This is predicated upon the persistence of a subject/object distinction. The paranoid tendencies of the film's conspiracist discourse works against this, with a view of an increasingly sophisticated and technologically-based social fabric and symptomatic images of the subject's absorption by it. The

latter tendency works towards a confusion of the subject/object distinction.

Technological conspiracy can be understood as a sub-generic or trans-generic mode of narrative which offers the viewer satisfaction in its capability to provide an all-embracing explanation for social phenomena which resist simple comprehension. As symptomatic responses to reified notions of a 'technological society' the conspirary narratives are less of a genuine response to questions of new technology, than they are part of a more general set of discursive practices. Frederick Jameson has characterized contemporary paranoid fiction as in fact a

> 'privileged representational shorthand for grasping a network of power and control even more difficult for our minds and imaginations to grasp...conspiracy theory (and its garish manifestations) must be seen as a degraded attempt - through the figuration of advanced technology - to think the impossible totality of the contemporary world system'.[1]

The fear of the technologically sophisticated is, for Jameson, the symptom of a 'cultural dominant' /post-modernism/ that is rooted in basic issues of social organization:

> 'I want to avoid the implication that technology is in any way the "ultimate determining instance" either of our present-day social life or of our cultural production: such a thesis is of course at one with the post-Marxist notion of a "post-industrialist" society. Rather, I want to suggest that our faulty representations of some immense communicational and computer network are themselves but

> a distorted figuration of something even deeper, namely the whole world system of present-day multi-national capitalism'.[2]

Techno-paranoia is the negative face of post-modern culture, the distorted and vague apprehension of the contemporary subject's relation to multi-national capitalism's institutional base and extension into communications technology. Jameson uses the phrase 'post-modern sublime' to characterize this unsettling and 'dimly-perceivable' 'other'.[3] Post-modernity is a vexed issue, at the centre of current aesthetic and sociological debate and it is not my intention, here, to conduct either an overview of the field or an attempt to define it in an all-encapsulating manner. General and useful accounts of its development as a practice in aesthetics and criticism can be found in an issue of Screen devoted to the subject (Vol.128, No.2, Spring 1987), a series of articles published in The Guardian (1-3 Dec. 1986) and in a collection of essays, Postmodern Culture (Ed. Hal Foster, 1985).[4] Jameson's article in New Left Review remains one of the most influential accounts of the movement and one of the few to venture an explanation of its socio-economic context. (For further references, see Bibliography).

What remains fairly consistent to all examinations of post-modern culture is a core of themes and aesthetic practices usually cited as typical. The theme of powerlessness which I have been pursuing continues in this canon. First of all, following Guy Debord's claim that, 'the image has become the final form of commodity reification', Jameson points to an obsession with the image - especially the photographic. Aesthetic

production has been subsumed under commodity production and the necessity for newer and newer commodities (images) has led to a detachment from any sense of objective and knowable reality. So rapidly does the turnover of images occur that we are soon caught up with images referring back only to other images, rather than an historical event. Here the concept of the Platonic simulacrum is invoked, 'the identical copy for which no original ever existed'. (One thinks of Jules Feiffer's account of Ronald Reagan and Pat O'Brien celebrating their time together at Nôtre Dame with full media coverage. They were there to celebrate an experience realized only by their parts in the film Knute Rockne : All American, 1940). This phenomenon encourages several prevalent tendencies: eclecticism, nostalgia and pastiche.

The past, insofar as it is able to furnish us with a fund of images, icons and styles for consumption, is revisited again and again; 'Post-modernism in the visual arts sees the past as a supermarket source that the artist raids for whatever goodies he wants', (Hugh Herbert).[4] Despite this attention to the past, our access to it in terms of any claims to objective knowledge diminishes through the interposition of an escalating canon of images. In Jameson's words, 'the history of aesthetic styles replaces "real" history', moving towards a point at which 'the past as referent finds itself gradually bracketed and effaced altogether, leaving us with nothing but texts'. Thus our fascination with history, our nostalgia, is for a simulacral past; we lose our purchase on what Lyotard has called the great narrative (grand recit) of history.

Our diminishing capacity to make sense of the 'real' (through burgeoning complexity of communications and the culture of the simulacrum) feeds our feelings of social and psychological powerlessness that characterize the 'post-modern sublime'. We are caught up within a

> 'cultural form of image addiction which, by transforming the past into visual mirages, stereotypes or texts, effectively abolishes any practical sense of the future and of the collective project, thereby abandoning the thinking of future change to fantasies of sheer catastrophe and inexplicable cataclysm - from visions of "terrorism" on the social level to those of cancer on the personal'.[5]

Parody, the critical and ironic quotation of past or present style, gives way to pastiche as early styles, narratives, heroes and icons are resurrected unmindful of contemporary reinterpretation. Clint Eastwood's Pale Rider (1985), for example, is quite evidently a reworking of Shane (George Stevens:1953); it quotes extensively from the latter, going so far as to reconstruct whole scenes. In recreating this 'authentic' past (a cinematic past) we are given a film which draws its sense of values from a source text which is self-consciously mythical rather than classical in the first place. Shane was, from the first, a deliberate celebration of the western's mythic core and frequently escapes parody only by the skin of its teeth. Pale Rider displays little evidence, if any, of wishing to expose or interrogate this state of affairs.

This kind of mystification is compounded by the eclectic tendency. Past styles are encouraged to co-exist with present, high culture with

low or mass culture, and with little assignation of priority; an equivalence is conferred upon all elements by the mere fact of their recognition by the reader/viewer. A knowingness in the audience is, according to Hugh Herbert, a crucial component of post-modernism which is especially detectable with televisual culture:

> 'In one degree or another the audience for postmodern art is made to become involved in the cultural process itself.
>
> That requires the widest spread of shared, small fragments of information about dozens of different subjects coming from a hundred different sources. At one extreme the quiz, the game show, and their up-market equivalent, Mastermind, are all primitive forms of interactive television where part of the entertainment is trying to beat the contestants on the screen; and part is nibbling information that is useless except as cultural cocktail snacks.
>
> At the other extreme the arts come Omnibused, Arenaed and South Banked. Postmodernism is processed art. Kraft cheese culture. And everyone has the means to do the home processing: the television set. It doesn't just apply in the arts, the irony of the surge of single issue politics is that it offers the punters more issues than would ever have worried them before: television enables us to make up our own rainbow coalitions'.[6]

Although this may be in the debt of Marshall McLuhan's 'global village' with its implied expansion of the subject's knowledge of the

world, this knowledge is adjudged to be less than practical owing to its fragmentary and rootless nature. Trivial Pursuits is the supremely post-modern board-game where scraps of information gleaned from high and low culture earn equal rewards in a situation that eschews the need for their application.

Fragmentation extends to the basic character of our social life as our sense of social norms is assaulted by competing lifestyles. Initial advantages of cultural diversity now appear to risk proliferation and subdivision into a state of Babel, where difference is unsupported by underlying perceptions of common social purpose. This all-absorbing question of style is explained by Jameson as follows:

> '[T]he explosion of modern literature into a host of distinct private styles and mannerisms has been followed by a linguistic fragmentation of social life itself to the point where the norm itself is eclipsed: reduced to a neutral and reified media speech (far enough from the Utopian aspirations of the inventors of Esperanto or Basic Engligh), which itself then becomes but one more idiolect among many. Modernist styles thereby become postmodernist codes: and that the stupendous proliferation of social codes today into professional and disciplinary jargons, but also into the badges of affirmation of ethnic, gender, race, religious, and class-fraction adhesion, is also a political phenomenon, the problem of micropolitics sufficiently demonstrates'.[7]

In a disturbing short novel which might serve as a virtual handbook of post-modern breakdown, J.G. Ballard presents an almost exhaustive

catalogue of ingredients for the post-modern sublime. The Atrocity Exhibition features a protagonist, Travis, who is degenerating into a psychotic breakdown. His 'reluctance to accept the fact of his own consciousness' finds him wandering through a landscape redolent of catastrophe, where the spaces of the body and its environment enjoy a certain equivalence and confusion. In Ballard's narrative causality is rejected for short segments with headings offered more in the manner of a list without priority: Apocalypse, Notes Towards a Mental Breakdown, Internal Landscapes, The Weapons Range, are headings that might offer some momentary grip upon a world where the mundane and the apocalyptic compete for attention. The opening of the book amply demonstrates the sense of helplessness of the subject in the face of the post-modern world. The scene is that of the 'Atrocity Exhibition', comprising the works of institutionalized mental patients:

> 'Apocalypse. A disquieting feature of this annual exhibition - to which the patients themselves were not invited - was the marked preoccupation of the paintings with the theme of world cataclysm, as if these long-incarcerated patients had sensed some seismic upheaval within the minds of their doctors and nurses. As Catherine Austin walked around the converted gymnasium these bizarre images with their fusion of Eniwetok and Luna Park, Freud and Elizabeth Taylor, reminded her of the exposed spinal levels in Travis's office. They hung on the walls like the codes of insoluble dreams, the keys to a nightmare in which she had begun to play a more willing and calculated role'.[8]

The subjects of this post-modern world are patients, uninvited to the spectacular confusion that is their culture, a culture of the

Apocalypse and the trivial rendered as image.

Following these characteristic trends, there have been attempts to provide a general hypothesis about the post-modern subject leading into questions of psychological constitution. If the cultural forms of modernism have been replaced by those of post-modernism, argues Frederick Jameson, then there has also been a recognizably consistent shift in the conception of the subject as it appears in these forms, in theory and in criticism. His conclusion is as follows:

> '...concepts such as anxiety and alienation (and the experience to which they correspond, as in The Scream) are no longer appropriate in the world of the postmodern. The great Warhol figures - Marilyn herself, or Edie Sedgewick - the notorious burn-out and self-destruction cases of the ending 1960's, and the great dominant experiences of drugs and schizophrenia - these would seem to have little enough in common anymore, either with the hysterics and neurotics of Freud's day, or with those canonical experiences of radical isolation and solitude, anomie, private revolt, Van Gogh-type madness, which dominated the period of high modernism. This shift in the dynamics of cultural pathology can be characterised as one in which the alienation of the subject is displaced by the fragmentation of the subject.
>
> (my emphasis. P.B.)[9]

This post-modern articulation of the subject is a useful concept which can be applied to our discussion of the horror film. We may begin to identify a similar movement in the horror film itself, from

the alienated self of the Freudian repression hypothesis and its horrific apotheosis in the myriad forms of the doppelgänger (the critical complement to which is the line from Kracauer to Wood traced earlier), to the representation of corporal decay and disintegration which is in so many ways the hallmark of the modern horrific; the subject is threatened with the destruction of what stands in Lacanian psycho-analysis as the fundamental signifier of its unity: the body. We can pursue this last point further, but before doing so, it will be helpful to clarify the foregoing remarks on post-modern culture and the shift in subjectivity by using examples from the horror film. This can be achieved by contrasting and comparing Howard Hawks's The Thing from Another World (1951) with John Carpenter's ostensible remake: The Thing (1982). In doing so, we can, while noting some of the tendencies outlined by Jameson, see the two films as suggesting, respectively, two historical conceptions of the self: alienated monad of the 'lonely crowd' era, and fragmented and disaffected construct of a fractured and incohesive social experience.

As a remake, The Thing falls into place with the trend, in popular post-modernism, of producing remakes of successful or cult films, especially those which are populated with characters whose opinions and actions celebrate social and moral values now perceived to be untenable. This last fact is underscored by the need to treat such material, in its remade condition, with a customary ironic distance. It is argued that the effect of this allusionism is one of negating the audience's acceptance of the film's meaning beyond reference to itself as part of a tradition of mere entertainment. Identified by Andrew Britton as a component of 'Reaganite entertainment', this trend

of reworking Hollywood's past formulas is distinguished from what might properly be called genre as follows:

> 'It is another factor distinguishing the conventions of these films from those of genre that they are primarily engaged in referring to themselves and other movies; and related with media products and in flattering the spectator with his or her familiarity with the forms and keepings of a hermetic entertainment "world". The invocation of "the western" in Rio Bravo or The Man who Shot Liberty Valance subserves a critical investigation of the conditions of existence of the genre. Self-reference, in other words, is in this case a means to a more rigorous reference outwards - to the culture in which the western has been a significant cultural form. Reaganite entertainment refers to itself in order to persuade us that it doesn't refer outwards at all. It is, purely and simply, "entertainment" - and we all know what that is'.[10]

With a somewhat less pessimistic tone this view is developed by Noel Carrol[x] in terms of the intentional use of allusion by the 'movie-brat' generation of film-makers which would include John Carpenter.

I have yet to read a review or analysis of The Thing that cedes it any real significance, yet it reveals, under a closer inspection, a far more than casual relation to the original. Its differences from, as much as its similarities to, Hawks's film are consistent enough to indicate that it is not simply a 'parasitical' text drawing credibility

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[x] In The Future of Allusion : Hollywood in the Seventies (and Beyond), in October, Spring 1982, No.2.

merely by allusion. In a hostile review of the film geared to demonstrating 'how far down the primrose path to obscene mindlessness the genre has already slipped', Joss Marsh compares the two films as follows:

> 'The format /of the Hawks film/ is familiar and now long over-worked, but it does provide explanation and analysis of the events and a sense of the normal against which the abnormal can stand out in relief...
>
> Not only does Carpenter neglect to set off normality with abnormality - a necessary process of selection and analysis in our everyday lives, he fails even to define the abnormal'.[11]

While I would be hesitant to describe The Thing as a film which addresses issues of genre per se, it is a film which is not merely self-conscious in its deployment of traditional formal and thematic elements; it is persistent with its portrayal of the breakdown of the very society which the earlier film is so obviously rooted in. As such, The Thing exhibits a studied use of its source material, as opposed to a deracinated quotation of fragments from the early text. By doing this, it achieves a portrait of a fragmented collection of individuals whose representative relation to contemporary society is defined precisely by the film's departure from the earlier film's dramatic foundation upon the Hawksian group. To return to the above, negative account of the film, it becomes apparent that the question of the film's treatment of normality is a crucial one, but that its failure to produce a clearly defined opposition between normality and the 'other' is not a symptom of its lack of purpose, but part of its construction within the terms of a post-modern sensibility.

One or Two Things

We might usefully commence by noting the immediate and obvious difference between the two films: Carpenter's decision to revert to the plot device of the original novel by John Wood Campbell - the significantly-titled Who Goes There? Both versions retain the essential formula of an isolated polar base populated by groups of experts menaced by an alien being, a 'Thing'. But whereas in the Campbell/Carpenter version the creature is able to assume the identity of each person/lifeform it attacks, in the Hawks film, the monster remains crucially distinct and separate throughout. The change of title is important since the emphasis of the original film is that the Thing is, as I will show, far more restricted in its capacity to be externalized as 'other'.

The metaphorical range of The Thing From Another World, its capacity to figure as the 'other' is quite broad and relatively well-defined. We can identify four major - and mutually reinforcive - categories through which this process takes place. All of these categories are important to the working of the text as a whole, but vary in the extent that they are the immediate fruits of ideas and events commonly periodized as somehow the exclusive yield of the 'fifties':

a) The 'little green men' of the 'Flying Saucer Scare' that broke out after initial 'sightings' in the summer of June 1947. In this film the Thing remains resolutely from outer space. Another kind of life, vegetable in nature, the Thing is an 'other' designated the status of exotic, fantastic and alien in the most extreme sense.

The UFO phenomenon has been subject to a variety of interpretations and has, of course, occurred throughout the ages and in different cultures in one form or another. Certain commentators have attributed the saucer scares of the 'forties to specific anxieties, as in C.G. Jung's claim that the mass hysteria over the Welles radio broadcast of War of the Worlds was a result of 'latent emotion connected to the imminence of war'.[12] While this may be partly the case, it needs to be taken into account that the thing offers a variety of interpretive possibilities, not all of which are immediately attributable to such a straightforward historical postulation. Whatever else it might be specifically identified as, the Thing, as alien from outer space, remains a convenient repository for all manner of inchoate discontents.

b) Communism: Russia; China...

American negative images of Communism are consistently identifiable in the depiction of the Thing and its activities. Occasionally, these are made explicit, as in the remark about Russians being 'all over the Pole, like flies'. This is then carried over to the Thing itself when the device rigged up to exterminate it is referred to as a 'fly-trap'. The contemporary development of the Cold War and the involvement at the time in the Korean conflict offer an immediate context for the film's construction of certain common and traditional American characterizations of Communism.

The above insect imagery is similar to that used in the film Them! (Gordon Douglas:1954), another of the fifties Sci-Fi/horror cycle, in that it suggests the ruthless, dispassionate and efficient behaviour of the insects is not unlike that of Communists. Them! is particularly

insistent in linking such allusions to the collective image of the ants which are the film's monsters. Emotionlessness is emphasized in The Thing...by the various references to the creature's vegetable nature and by association with the character of Professor Carrington (Robert Cornthwaite) who is given a clearly European treatment in his beard and clothing: black wool hat, coat with an astrakhan collar etc.

c) Genius, non-utility science, intellectualism...

Standing out above the rest of the research team, Carrington appears as an abstracted and obsessive autocrat who will sanguinely consign humanitarian considerations to oblivion in the process of advancing the frontiers of human knowledge. Being the 'fellow that was at Bikini', he bears the Promethean stigma for tampering with forbidden knowledge - the consequence of the intellectual habit of mind. By association with the Thing - he discovers, unearths and defends it - Carrington is implied to be a similar 'intellectual carrot'; the inhumane behaviour of the scientist is a complement to the reified image of intellectually and scientifically-advanced, but emotionally bankrupt culture that the Thing embodies. It is in this respect the earlier model of Jameson's 'post-modern sublime', a kind of modernist or romantic/authentic sublime. A complex of negative images are developed via the Carrington/Thing association to produce a polysemic 'other' opposed to the common sense values of the film's definition of normality, the Hawksian male group. The historical specificity of this aspect of the film is illustrated by a right-wing attack on 'eggheads' (into which Carrington fits) by the novelist Louis Bromfield. Written in 1952, it is in the form of a dictionary entry:

'Egghead: A person of spurious intellectual pretensions, often

a professor or the protégé of a professor. Fundamentally superficial. Over-emotional and feminine in reactions to any problem. Supercilious and surfeited with conceit and contempt for the experience of more sound and able men. Essentially confused in thought and immersed in a mixture of sentimentality and violent evangelism. A doctrinaire supporter of Middle-European socialism as opposed to Greco-French-American ideas of democracy and liberalism. Subject to the old-fashioned philosophical morality of Nietzsche which frequently leads him into jail or disgrace...'[13]

The film is able to separate this kind of intellectualism and scientific theoreticism from the acceptable image of applied science, the consumer branch of the same tree of knowledge. Practical science is demonstrated by the military team's know-how, notably in their application of electricity to destroy the Thing. Part of the establishment of normality in the film, then, is the definition of science as useful and acceptable when kept within the limits of the layman's understanding.

d) Uncontrolled libidinal energy.

Throughout the film we are given numerous examples which amount to a concerted attempt to identify the Thing with Pat Hendry, the leader of the military team (Kenneth Tobey) and the film's hero. This aspect of the text serves to establish the Thing as the monstrous embodiment of Hendry's frustrated sexual interest in Nikki (Margaret Sherdan): Hendry meets up with Nikki at the polar base after what we gather was a failed attempt at lovemaking during their last encounter. Hendry

is clearly embarrassed and his masculinity is thrown into question as Nikki makes sport out of the situation. This particular tension is suggested in relation to the activities of the Thing when, after Nikki finds Pat has managed to free himself from a chair to which she has playfully tied him, she asks 'How long have you been loose?' and receives the cryotic reply, 'Long enough'. Pat's escape from this restraint upon himself (implicitly upon his masculinity) offers itself for comparison to the lease of life given the Thing after its thawing from the ice.

Since the creature's hand is explicitly referred to as it's sexual organ, the link is again developed when Nikki refers to Pat's hands having been all over her like an octopus. Pat's sexual advances are thus constructed as monstrous and through the same kind of imagery. Furthermore, the Thing's ability to regenerate tissue after its hand is severed becomes thematically compounded in this way so as to present an idea of irrepressible phallic energy undiminished by attempts at castration.

There are many more similar examples to be found in the film but these will suffice for our immediate purposes, finalizing with Margaret Tarrat's admirable formulation of the film's overall narrative systematization of these elements:

> 'the manner in which.../Pat Hendry/...handles the military situation created by the Thing's presence is an image of the way in which he handles himself in relation to Nikki'.[14]

In this sense, the Thing acts as that libidinal 'other' in relation

to Pat Hendry who, after successfully putting down the Thing, subdues his impulsive sexuality by agreeing to settle down with Nikki. That is, he allows his sexuality to be re-inscribed within the conventions of the Law; marriage, monogamy...

One of the dominant textual strategies of the Thing is, then, the creation of the monstrous as the familiar, self-confirming 'other'. As a monstrous projection of negative cultural values the oppositional status of the Thing confirms the film's established normality. The construction of the film's subjectivity within the terms of the male group, patriarchal relations, America is achieved by offering punishable or disposable figures - Carrington, the Thing - into which disturbing challenges to the subject may be projected and denied. This is a subjectivity which is plainly troubled by conflicting impulses and definitions but which nonetheless is still functioning within clearly established frameworks of the normal and abnormal.

The film is constantly inviting us to share the space and activities of the team, in leisure and at work. Where we are generally present in the warm and reassuring interior of the base, the Thing is mainly located outside, in the cold and away from us. Its presence is assumed more than actual. It appears only when absolutely necessary and its features are barely discernable; we are denied access to its whereabouts and actions, precluding any possibility of point-of-view.[x]

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[x]It is a point of some interest that the Thing, played by James Arness, did possess sufficient detail in its costume and make-up to withstand closer scrutiny; decisions to remain at a distance were obviously not decided by this factor. What emerges most strikingly are the high forehead associating it with intellect, and the extraordinary, phallic thumb extensions.

If the film is constructed in a manner which establishes the subject as divided, this is a phenomenon that it is the work of the narrative to 'manage' and to allay doubts about. Unlike the post-modern world described by Jameson, the protagonists of the film inhabit a world/culture that is perfectly knowable and understandable; the microcosm of the base is governed by strict rules, of patriarchy, military codes, the team ethic, moral principles and so on. If the immediate post-war years in the US were fraught with certain apocalyptic themes, these were often dealt with by means of a world-view constructed on the principles of us and them (U.S. and Them!) ethics, allowing the dismissal of contradictory attitudes, ideologies etc. under the notion of Un-American. The separation of subject/object remains fairly viable in films like the above, enabling the projection of the subject's 'monstrous' and disawowed components into the plane of the object world. This permits the marginalization of the film's enemies, through the use of mise-en-scène to confirm a sense of the unified subject comfortably in the cultural values of its day. If we move on now to consider Carpenter's remake, it will become apparent that this situation is no longer capable of being sustained. The film is systematic in exploiting the Hawks text in order, not merely to pay hommage, but to expose areas in which its fundamental world-view is no longer possible; a kind of post-modern reply.

To compare the final scenes is instantly illuminating. In the original, the final note is of a kind of triumphal isolationism, a, by now nostalgic, celebration of the Monroe Doctrine of the pre-Truman era. The 'Shut the door!' imperative, literally reiterated

throughout the script, has been effected, and the return to complete normality is marked by the re-establishing of radio contact with the General (and thus the Law). The group identity is foregrounded, as the team (including Nikki and the newspaperman, Scottie (Douglas Spencer) righteously dominate the framing of the scene, accompanied by Scottie's admonition to the world: 'Keep watching the skies'. If there is any sense of insecurity, personal or national, or any trace of ambivalence it is consigned to the future and 'the skies'.

By contrast, the finale of the Carpenter film crystallizes the horror of a situation where the Thing, rather than existing as a separate and recognizably other creature, assimilates itself to the physical form of the victim assuming all external qualities. In doing so, it assumes identical habits of speech and behaviour in a way that seems to break down any of the customary criteria for distinguishing the individuality or uniqueness of human identity. That this is not the simple 'taking over' of the famous Invasion of the Bodysnatchers or It Came from Outer Space films of the 'fifties is something to which I shall return.[15] By the end of this film we find only two characters remaining since the creature's presence has generated not solidarity but self-destruction within the group living at the base; as it is impossible - without resorting to laborious and tardily-discovered tests - to tell exactly who is or is not a Thing, then the defensive energies of the group are directed not outward, as in the original film, but inward towards themselves to create a breakdown of their already tenuous social group. The remaining couple - MacCreadie (Kurt Russell), the 'hero' and Childs (Keith David) sit alone in front of the burning research station (they have destroyed it

themselves) with no radio contact, no supplies, a dwindling source of heat and no prospect of assistance. As they share a bottle of spirits in the film's only real gesture of social bonding or friendship, their brief, positive act occurs as the necessary basis for the sense of community lacking throughout the film, and, at the same time, one virtually guaranteed no future. The scene takes place in front of a destroyed base, the annihilation of which suggests some kind of a tabula rasa, as if the film's remaining characters have destroyed their previous culture, confusions and suspicions only to arrive at a point where the possibility of a situation better than the former is all but lost.

In arriving at this fairly apocalyptic state of affairs Carpenter makes departures from the original which see the Hawksian group ethic rendered impossible by the conflicting cultural fractions of the 'eighties. Two major absences from the original text provide us with a means of establishing this. Those of the Russians and of women.

It is not simply the change in historical context which has contributed to the loss of the Soviet allusions within the narrative - in many ways the early Reagan years provided the most receptive climate for anti-Communist sentiment since the time of the Hawks film. Rather, it is indicative of a sense of social and psychological subjectivity which has altered significantly enough to be no longer sustainable through the generic and narrative conventions of Cold War horror fiction.

The Soviet menace provides a crucial and negative socio-political other, against which the group's unquestioned Americanism can be

defined, and to which undesirable deviations such as Carrington's emotionless autocratism may be compared. The simple-minded equation of the Russians with the monstrous may seem a crude and irrational symptom of the political extremist social climate, but neither it, nor the culture opposed to it are characterized with any sense of irony. The film produces a constant sense of shared identity which the separate professional interests of the military and scientific teams in no way threatens. The Hawksian theme of team-work provides the film with repeated displays of co-operation and the final extermination of the Thing is a positive hymn to the collective endeavour.

In contrast with this, the characters of the remake are disaffected misfits whose social and professional identities are poorly-defined. Their culture is fractional and obstructs communication within the crew. In the original, the isolation of the characters at the base develops after we establish their basic identity at the officer's club in Anchorage - a cosy ambience with the facilities of a home from home. The separation from the rest of the world, heightened by the loss of radio contact, serves as a kind of test for their resolve as bearers of certain cultural values. However, in Carpenter's film contact with the outside world is nil and, unlike the original, is never re-established. For the 'fifties text this re-establishment is one of cultural normality, in which the values of the team are confirmed by the General's benediction over the radio. In the remake it is inconceivable that survival and contact could entail any such acceptance of authority without an accompanying and endistancing irony; the entire value system and social structure which made the idea of re-establishing contact desirable or meaningful, has

collapsed into vagueness, contradiction and mockery.

The base is a den of apathy and uncertainty. In opposition to the scenes at the officers' club at Anchorage in the original, we find Mac sitting alone and bored in his isolated little hut, drinking heavily and playing on his computer-chess game. The upright Pat Hendry has been replaced with a 'whisky swigging anti-establishment layabout, logically incapable of assuming the role of leader that the part imposes on him'[16] and whose attitude to rules and conventions is apparent when he throws his drink into the computer after losing a game. Other members present a collective image of social fragmentation, of people modelling themselves around a variety of disparate cultural images and stereotypes. Their identities are the pastiches of Jameson's 'logic of the simulacrum' to which the whole film - as a remake - conforms. Identity has been assembled from images of pre-existing popular identities or implied from associations with particular jobs; the crew contains military, scientific and support elements. Those defined by functional associations are for the most part compromised by a general lack of apparent interest in their work - nobody really seems to be doing anything - or by manifest incompetence. Two examples seem quite deliberately constructed as responses to the earlier text: Garry (played by Donald Moffat whose age harks back to the period of the original) plays the nominal military figure in command. Wearing a costume similar to that of Pat Hendry's team creates an allusion which is not sustained by his adequacy to the task or by his screen presence. He is an elderly character whose capacity to be decisive under pressure is minimal and whose masculine authority is mocked by the younger men when he is obliged to use his gun near the start of

the film. Consequently, his authority defaults, during the film, onto the character of Mac.

Similarly, the character of Windows, as the radio operator, is a parody of the earnest attempts of Hendry's own who spares no effort in his vigil at the console and persists until contact is made at the end of the film. In contrast, Windows - whose name is ironic since his non-communicative nature is conveyed by the impenetrability of his dark glasses - not only fails to make contact, but is negligent at his post; Garry wakes him up by winding up the volume on his headphones.

The most colourful and memorable of the cast are those whose images derive most obviously from the lives of others; identities have been plundered and assumed as style in a manner that lacks evidence of deep affiliation with their cultural origins and which appears inappropriately alienating or absurd in their present context. Palmer (David Clennan) is a mixture of stoned hippie and Hell's Angel, wearing an 'original' jacket; Nauls (T.K. Carter) is a cool black stereotype who skateboards around the base irritating people with his ghetto-blaster's excessive volume, and Mac himself is a vaguely military helicopter pilot hiding behind dark glasses and a ludicrously huge sombrero.

There are no figures comparable to the Russians in this film because there is no evidence of comprehension - outside the boundaries of the media-constructed fragments from which the characters assemble their self-images - of any real world outside. In one scene the Hell's Angel, Palmer, sits and watches re-runs of American game shows on the

video. He has seen them all before, is stoned on dope and is actually hearing different sounds on his personal hi-fi. The lack of knowledge of the outside world is fatally evident in the consequences of their encounter with the Norwegian expedition. The word Norge on the outside of the helicopter is a matter of some controversy at first, and even after it has been pointed out that they are definitely Norwegian, Mac persists in referring to them as Swedes. Idea and image rule over the reality; it is all Scandinavia presumably and the idea of Swedes is as good as the fact of Norwegians. The failure to understand the Norwegians and the ignorance of their isolated project is crucial and is the original source of the base's troubles. More and more these troubles appear to be the product of the fragmentation of the group, as the expression of their problems of identity and purpose, and their lack of any substantial or shared purchase on 'reality'. Even the acceptance of the Thing's existence evokes little in the way of genuine astonishment; this is to say that there is nothing in their responses to indicate the sense of serious threat to normality that is customarily found in earlier horror texts such as the Hawks film. In large part, this kind of sincerity has been bankrupted by our/their all-too-knowing relationship with popular culture. The response of the permanently stoned Palmer to intelligence of the creature's having arrived in a spacecraft is the off-handed declaration that, 'It happens all the time man. They're falling out of the skies like flies. Government knows all about it...Chariots of The Gods man'. The example is interesting, not only for its implication that the potential for future amazement has been circumvented by media hype, but for the knowing fly reference incorporating the original film into this process. The image awaits the event dictating our responses in advance. As if

to consolidate this state of affairs, the scene of the discovering of the ship by the Norwegians is watched by the crew of Americans on a video screen. It is the famous encirclement scene from the original film. Thus the past of the film is constructed as a cinematic one.

One of the classical features of the 1951 film, as we have already noted, is its use of the Thing to mobilize ideas associated with repressed sexual desire. This forms part of an argument about their social undesirability which is resolved by the demise of the creature and the settling down of Pat Hendry to the prospect of married life with Nikki. Hawks's film is peppered with references to women and to men's relation to and understanding of them. By contrast, the remake contains no women, no allusions to them of any kind and its construction of the monstrous cannot logically, therefore, be understood in any similar light. First of all, we may note that the obvious line of approach, for anyone determined to expose the presense of frustrated desire in the text, might be to raise questions about homosexuality. However, this leads to little beyond the most reductive exploitation of the film's basic situation. Given that the narrative is centred around a group of men living in the absence of women for long periods of time in isolation, then there might be an initial temptation to read the various suspicions, fears and problems of identity, and the spectacular 'coming out' which attends the Thing's exposure in terms of the resurfacing of a repressed homosexuality. Yet there is little more than this to be found. Nowhere is there an attempt to connect these possibilities to wider systems of implication or to present them as part of the logical process of inference in the text. The monster, for example, contains little that might integrate it into such a project.

What is truly striking is the film's sheer indifference to questions of sexuality. Apart from the original film's central articulation of the Hendry/Nikki problem in relation to the activities of the monster, there is a general sense of energy and action which extends into possible readings of virility, libido desire and so forth. This force's redirection into culturally legitimate channels is understood by the organization and control of that energy in the military team's harmonious and disciplined performance against the monster. As is so often the case, the military regime is a succinct image of patriarchal management at work. The Thing's relation to the Hendry/Nikki issue is then readable in terms of uncontrolled libidinal force, and a threat to that order. The remake is remarkable for its lack, not only of women, but of the sense of any kind of energy, libidinal or otherwise, that might be attributable to the characters. Such actions as are taken are largely due to the necessity of defence and the film's major demonstrations of energy are undertaken by the Thing as it gruesomely tears itself apart to change shape. It seems apparent that this whole set of narrative presuppositions about patriarchy and the classical narrative predication upon the romantic couple has disappeared along with patriarchy's possible relegation to one style or discourse among many of the film - trivialized to the level of gestures like Mac's ludicrous cowboy hat.

A final perspective on the film's central preoccupations is provided by a consideration of the creature itself; its appearance and mode of operation.

First of all, it is given a persistent association with aspects of advanced technology. Not only does it arrive in a spaceship (as does

the original) but it becomes linked with the film's designated scientist figure Blair (Wilford Brimley). It is he who discovers its nature and first understands it. Later he is revealed to have been assimilated by it, and has been constructing a new spaceship from cannibalized technology. This association of the monstrous with technology operates in conjunction with the variety of images the film offers of the socially degrading effects of consumer-orientated high-technology: personal hi-fi's; video machines; ghetto blasters; computer chess games. Through their absorption in these kinds of electronic diversions, the crew exist in a state of alienation from each other, inhibited or disencouraged from communicating with each other.

Secondly, the suggestion of the Thing in connection with degenerative social relations is consolidated by the film's construction of character within the terms of pastiche. We can parallel the ability of the creature to assume the appearance and apparently the thought of the victims with the way that key members of the crew seem to be appropriating their identities from others; the Hell's Angel; the cowboy; the skate-boarding black. The characters define themselves through a variety of shop-worn identities, magpie selves suggesting a superficiality of existence.[x] This loss of authenticity carries over to the creature. Blair discovers that the Thing, at its barest cellular

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[x]This is a departure from the traditional utilization of stereotyping, which, although associated with the construction of marginalized cultural identity, is nonetheless based on received ideas about social norms. In particular, the characterizations of film heroes or protagonists are traditionally more likely to achieve a sense of unique and individualist identity from their contrast with stereotypes such as foreign or sub-cultural agents. Adding to this is the grounding of those stereotypes, however clichéd or insubstantial in their plausibility as characters, within their appropriate milieu, which serves to create their presence as one of representativeness. By contrast, the characters of The Thing are inappropriately alluding to cultural identities whose significance serves as a destabilizing force, undermining their presence by sheer incongruity and preventing them from functioning, or appearing to function with any sense of common purpose.

level, comprises nothing more than a commensal life-form where each individual cell is capable of assuming the identity and characteristics of whatever it attacks. It exists simply to mimic, to take on other patterns. As the characters are constructed within this depthless notion of identity they appear as hollow men, attempting to forge themselves from codes of appearance inappropriate to their circumstance. Mere simulacra, they are swamped by images of a past and present. The Thing itself provides a startlingly graphic image of this in its changes. In the moments of mutation, when it has been exposed for what it is (is not), we see the vague, half-formed outlines of all the different types of creature - human and otherwise - that it has absorbed. We see the tormented and distorted heads and limbs of dogs and crew members and of the spider-like beast it becomes at one point. It appears at these times as the most direct example, quite literally, of a pastiche identity with no genuine or authentic original. In this way, the monster functions simultaneously as an image of both cause and effect; of new technology and its feared social consequences; the actions of the monster are a source - for most of the film - of divisiveness in the group, rather than the rallying cry of the Hawks version. Since the creature is indistinguishable from the real person it has assimilated, then it creates an atmosphere of total suspicion among the crew who are incapable of trusting each other. Their already distant relation to each other is converted into open fear and hostility. In mockery of the first version, in which there is joking about Pat Hendry's being tied up by Nikki while drunk, the remake gives us a crucial scene devoted to unveiling who is, or is not, the Thing. In it the members of the crew are tied to chairs by Mac. As the test of identity takes place, we witness the only real group

effort that has taken place, and it is conducted at gunpoint and while tied up.

In the shift from the first to the second version of the story then, we can see a general collapse of values necessary to the sustenance of the other as a clearly-projected monstrous opposition to normality. Its alien qualities are not given the connotations of recognizable social or psychological dispositions since the shared (however qualified) cultural basis which makes that projection possible has broken down. The master discourses of patriarchy and nationalism are weakened and lost as identity loses its previous grounding in a world constructed for the subject by a confusing array of competing and mediated cultural positions. Consequently, the capacity of the film to figure otherness is radically compromised. What is monstrous in the film is metaphorically analogous to, and physically indistinguishable from the team which represents normality; its dispassionate migration from victim to victim is barely more self-interested than those upon whom it preys. The perceived identity problem of living under conditions of increasing cultural fragmentation produces an uncertainty in the established definitions of self/not self, a breakdown in that special subject/object distinction which has traditionally functions in narratives of all kinds, and which, in the horror genre has enabled the manipulation of disturbing/threatening phenomena or feelings in order to qualify or reject them. Since the making of Carpenter's film there has been an acceleration in the development of certain cultural phenomena which take the question of a post-modern subject into new terrain, and which, evidenced in films such as RoboCop (Paul Verhoeven:1987) and The Fly (David Cronenberg:1986) gives rise to correspondingly

symptomatic responses in the vocabulary of the contemporary horrific.

A recurrent observation among commentators upon post-modernity is that the beleaguered position of the contemporary subject is recognized in its failure to map itself adequately in the symbolic space of the world it presently inhabits. That is, it fails to maintain the previous sense of scale, time and boundary which guaranteed the individual a sense of distinctness and thus the foundation for the Cartesianism upon which its understanding of the world is based. Christopher Lasch, for instance, claims that,

> 'the older meaning of identity refers both to persons and to things. Both have lost their solidity in modern society, their definiteness and continuity. Identity has become uncertain and problematical not because people no longer occupy fixed social stations - a commonplace explanation that unthinkingly incorporates the modern equation of identity and social role - but because they no longer inhabit a world that exists independently of themselves'.[17]

Lasch's view is based on a psychologism which - in its marginalization of the social is at odds with most of the accounts to be found on the subject (and this would include this writer's view of the matter) - remains unexceptionable insofar as it describes a perceived dilemma for the modern self - its confusion with the world. In a typically apocalyptic essay, Jean Baudrillard writes that 'there is no longer any system of objects'. The new expanding network of communication systems is one in which the individual can no longer determine limits and in which the symbolic space of the body is retreating. Thus the individual is prey to:

> 'the absolute proximity, the total instanteneity of things, the feeling of no defense, no retreat. It is the end of interiority and intimacy, the overexposure and transparence of the world which traverses him without obstacle. He can no longer produce himself as a mirror. He is now only a pure screen, a switching centre for all the networks of influence'.[18]

In the new age of the electronic, physical scale and movement derived from physical labour has been displaced by the transmission of signals, of information produced by mental labour. Consequently,

> 'our body, often appears simply superfluous, basically useless in its extension, in the multiplicity and complexity of its organs, its tissues and functions, since today everything is concentrated in the brain and in genetic codes, which alone sum up the operative definition of being'.[19]

As the electronic sphere has advanced to a level of sophistication that appears intelligent to the uninformed, so too are there developments in the scientific investigation of the body which reduces it to information. Since the discovery of DNA we have been aware of the idea that our identity is initiated by a code or template. Recent developments have amplified this notion and taken it into areas with more unsettling implications. Genetic engineering, for example, admits the notion of direct manipulation into our sense of identity; of identity predetermined by others. Or of our basic material being integrated or confused with that belonging to something or someone else. A newspaper article earlier this year notes that 'they have fused a large piece of human protein with a small piece of rat antibody' in

order to fool the body's immune system in the treatment of cancer.[20] A scientific fact of this kind lends itself to disturbing fantasies of mutation in a film like The Fly where the original premise of confused body segments (heads, arms),developed in the Kurt Neumann version, is reworked in contemporary fashion to express an integration of the two parties at a molecular-genetic level. Speculating on the popular backlash against genetic engineering, Lewis Wolpert cites the work of Mary Douglas as a possible source of illumination, saying that,

> 'the idea of the chimera is a very old one and touches our psyche deeply. This may reflect that many of our taboos are, as Mary Douglas has shown, often related to boundaries. Crossing species is just the sort of boundary that may be expected to create the prohibitions that are currently being invoked. Or is it that our vitalistic soul demanding impulses are being threatened'.[21]

It seems possible that both observations are correct to the extent that the individualist imperative which funds such notions of 'soul' is profoundly compromised by any concept of pollution at the macro-molecular stage. We have reached a point where developments in forensics towards the practical application of 'genetic fingerprinting' encourage the popular sense of our uniqueness residing in our genetic make-up; yet at the same time there are whole areas of research devoted to the idea that this situation can be altered and predetermined. The mysterious concept of the soul has been displaced even further by the molecular signature and its potential for forged identity.

It is this area which so conveniently suggests the lost sense of boundaries and symbolic limitations that figures prominently in the

post-modern sensibility. Into this framework of fact and speculation has arrived the AIDS phenomenon. Although the impact of the HIV virus has been slow in reaching the public imagination, its eventual arrival in the last few years has inspired major responses, considered and otherwise, in the popular and critical discourses of our time. In a short time it has appropriated much of the character which Susan Sontag argues to be necessary for a disease to be adopted as a social metaphor; its significance for the present is indicated now by expressions like 'the AIDS era' used in certain instances to describe the late 'eighties. Recently, it has been the inspiration for a retrospective of 'epidemic cinema', Panic in the Streets staged at the National Film Theatre. The first point we can make about the disease is that its incurability factor makes it available as a 'synonym for death' and implicitly competing with cancer as a secular monster. Unlike the deployment of much imagery based on cancer, however, the AIDS crisis and its crucial sexual element are explicitly understood; the developing mythology already has made itself felt within the terms of quite precise narrative situations in the cinema and television. Peter Lennon, writing in The Listener about the TV drama about AIDS, Sweet as You Are, argues that

> 'AIDS has reintroduced a ready-made doom to drama that has been missing since the abolution of the death penalty...No matter that Martin's peccadillo was insignificant in itself, he is doomed. AIDS like a crime, can carry venomous undertows of guilt and betrayal'.[22]

Perhaps the most notorious instance of this was the quite open discussion of Fatal Attraction (Adrian Lyne:1987) in the popular press as a film capitalizing on the AIDS scare. Its narrative of monstrous

returns from an act of extra-marital sex was read as inevitably about AIDS. Borrowing many of its conventions from the horror film, Fatal Attraction is, according to Judith Williamson, a film in which 'the person sexually encountered becomes the disease'.[23]

To this extent we have to separate the deployment of popular discourses about the disease from those of earlier examples cited by Sontag. In the current climate, the popular rhetoric is in large part functioning as part of a repressive apparatus devoted to reproducing ideologically conservative values. The horrific image of cancer has functioned as a kind of systemic image whereas, in keeping with the socially fragmented metaphors we have already discussed, the AIDS rhetoric is part of a new apocalypticism that sees the family threatened by infectious temptations; it is a postulated norm against which socially marginalized groups - gays, prostitutes, junkies - are reduced to a dangerous and stereotypical other. Fictions which operate in this manner are constructing the AIDS metaphor and image within a not unfamiliar pattern in 'epidemic cinema'. As such they are using the disease metaphor less as a symptom of our overall social identity, than as part of a strategy for restoring the values of the past. In a wide-ranging account of this issue Simon Watney shows how this can be understood in relation to the kind of questions about the body that Michel Foucault has raised; that is, in its status as part of the potential regulatory apparatus of the state. We may conveniently close this aspect of the discussion with a succinct summary of this development:

> 'Aids offers a new sign for the symbolic machinery of repression, making the rectum a grave. At this point the categories of health and sickness, by which we also know our bodies, meet with those

> of sex, and the image of homosexuality is reinscribed with connotations of contagion and disease, a subject for medical attention and medical authority. Thus promiscuity has become at last a primarily medical term, just as morality has been effectively medicalised.
>
> That is why the representation of Aids seems so starkly anachronistic: gay sex, read as "promiscuous", is being medically redefined as unsafe. Aids takes us back to the pre-modern world, with disease restored to its ancient theological status as punishment'.[24]

While it has been necessary to illustrate the ways in which the AIDS crisis has produced a kind of monstrous 'throwback' of a response (into which it is fairly easy to insert horror films such as Tobe Hooper's Lifeforce (1985) in which a contagious, life-draining condition is transmitted with emphasis upon horrific same-sex encounters, prostitute and bi-sexual figures), there are certain other aspects of the AIDS syndrome and the HIV virus which are more ambivanently worked into the fabric of such an extraordinary post-modern text like The Fly. Chiefly, this is generated around the problem of maintaining an emotional relationship with someone whose physical condition is in an irreversible process of degeneration, and draws upon a physical problem derived from alien material fusing with the body of the subject. There is a sense in which the latter fusion of self/other is suggested by the action of the HIV virus in its ability to fool the body into accepting it as part of its own make-up.

The Fly

'I can imagine what it feels like to be a virus. The AIDS virus: look at it from his point of view - very vital, very excited, really having a good time. It's made the front page, and is really flexing its muscles and doing what it does. It's really a triumph, if you're a virus. It's really good stuff that's happening, it's not bad at all. A virus is a living creature - actually, sometimes they go crystalline on you, which is what's interesting. See the movies from the point of view of the disease. You can see why they would resist all attempts to destroy them. These are all cerebral games, but they have emotional correlatives as well'.[25]

(David Cronenberg)

While it can fairly be said that Cronenberg's remark is one which is best read as a provocative 'cerebral game', his remake of The Fly presents a problem of identity which at times borders on producing the kind of point of view expressed above. The plot is superficially similar to the original: A scientist Seth Brundle (Jeff Goldblum) is perfecting a new form of transport device, a matter transmitter. In testing the machine on himself, he fails to observe the presence of a house-fly in the same chamber as him. Consequently, the insect becomes fused with the human. Initially, he intends to mark the success of his transmission by a book and visual record conducted by his journalist girlfriend Ronnie (Geena Davis), but as his physical condition degenerates into a new life-form, 'Brundle-fly', he begins to lose his identity and his previous relation to the world. Throughout the film, Brundle's identity is defined in respect of his relationship with Ronnie; as his identity alters to accommodate that of the fly we see the breakdown

rendering much of the conventional basis of human emotional life meaningless.

The presence and consequence of new technology is central to any reading of the film. The attention to detail, absent in the first version of the story (1958), is far in excess of being explained by a contemporary pseudo-naturalism. The machinery of the Telepod and its effects upon society are of world-changing significance, and are characterized within the terms of a post-modern 'information society'. The first specification we can make is that it is depersonalizing or decentring for the human subject:

1) It challenges the human sense of time and space - our sense of scale and distance - by eliminating the time factor in travel. Our ability to traverse (presumably all) distances will now be instantaneous. This projection suggests Baudrillard's diagnosis of the 'transistorization of the environment' in which 'the body, landscape, time, all disappear as scenes'.

Further to this, the 'teething troubles' of the machine place it as ignorant or disruptive of the human form of 'the flesh'.

a) Its initial transmissions turn a baboon inside out.

b) Brundle gets it to function properly by making it learn the poetry of the flesh'.

c) It is the machine's ignorance of the importance in maintaining a distinction between the human and the fly which allows it to create the horrific fusion of the two.

2) It is part of those discursive patterns which posit the human

identity as reducible to data or a message:

In transmitting the human individual, it reduces them to mere codings on the screen of the computer, to electronic messages and the world of the instantaneous. Our first image in the film is a background for the credits in which we see a vaguely defined myriad of coloured dots moving in some kind of Brownian motion. After a while, what appears to be particles of the sort that might be viewed under a microscope resolve, so that we see they are in reality the unfocused images of members of a scientific conference. Attending the conference are Seth and Ronnie who is reporting for a journal called Particle.

Throughout the film, the fascination of the camera for the encoding/ decoding process on the machinery emphasizes the breakdown of the individual into a code. Later on, when a woman impressed with Seth's new-found fly-strength asks him if he is a body builder, he replies; 'Yeah, I take 'em apart and put 'em back together again'.

3) The film repeatedly connects these ideas to Brundle. He is partially represented as the traditional scientist figure whose character suggests the identity-impoverishing threat of scientific over-reaching.

a) He is socially naïve and lives in isolation. His sacrifice of identity is pre-figured in the narrative by his disclosure about dressing habits he has borrowed from Einstein. Accused of never changing his clothes, he reveals he has changed them repeatedly, but for others in his wardrobe. The wardrobe contains only clothing that is identical to that he has taken off, reducing the need to think about what he is going to wear. Personal signature has been rejected in favour of efficiency.

b) The construction of the machine - its abolition of the physical dimensions of space - appears to be something which is desired by Brundle's character. He is found to be habitually vulnerable to motion-sickness when Ronnie takes him home in her car. Also, his relationship with the age of information technology is expressed in his claim that he is 'really just a systems management man'.

c) The fusion with the fly that the machine implements, is, in part at least (insofar as the insect represents an image of the unfeeling and the machine-like), an attempt to suggest a direct association of Brundle and the technological. After this has taken place, a visual image is offered when he has to remove an Integrated Circuit chip from his back that has become accidentally stuck into his skin. Not only does it show a direct combination of his body and technology, but it is the site where the first changes appear in his body; the fly hairs protrude from the hole made by the chip. Finally, the film's last horrific change to Brundle is the result of a telepod accident that leaves him (now fully a Brundle-fly) fused with the machine, the telepod itself.

Following the pattern I have already outlined in post-modern horror, where the threat to identity is posed not from a monstrous other, but from a loss of the capacity to identify that other and the self it previously defined by contrast, the film gives us a protagonist whose identity is transformed at its most basic level.

1) The film takes time to establish with great clarity that the problem involves the fusion of 'self' and 'not-self'. An initial tendency to refuse the privileging of the human and the non-human is evidenced by the machine's description of the two in technically equivalent language. They are simply regarded as primary and secondary material.

2) There is an inexorable shedding of Brundle's identity, his physical change (unlike the 1958 version) also involves a transformation of his entire personality. His physical relation to the world is initially altered with extra strength, but also by a rejection of earlier spatial co-ordinates. He can now defy gravity and use walls and ceilings where he once was restricted to the floor. His features dissolve as his skin changes and parts of his body atrophy and drop off.

This is followed by the loss of his recognizable voice patterns; the computer refuses to acknowledge his command.

3) The alteration of identity becomes most emphatic in the 'voice' given to the insect half of the new persona. In typical Cronenbergian fashion, Brundle claims to be 'stricken by a disease with a purpose'. The new persona accepts who it is, rather than attempting to deny the new aspect as the other. Claiming an intention to become the first insect politician, Brundle announces the loss of the original person that he was as follows: 'I'm an insect who dreamt he was a man and he loved it. But now the dream is over and the insect is awake'.

If the effects of the machine in the film are terrible and their eventual result downbeat, there is nonetheless a sense of resistance

and opposition to the tidy programmes of modern technology. As in most of the director's films, the body acts as a site of unruly resistance to the asepticism of the scientific. Opposed to the order of predictability, the body throws up chaos.

There is an interesting connection made in the narrative between the disruption of the body in the experimental transfer and the parallel ruination of a planned media event. The post-modern preoccupation with mediated information and reality is implicit in the whole telepod experience of the human transmitted as a message; to a certain extent Brundle is broadcast to the state in which he finds himself. The idea that he might be a different person at the end of the transmission is cleverly articulated in his pun on the old audio tape advertisement, 'Is it life or is it Memorex?' In other words, is he Brundle or is he a copy?

This may be understood in conjunction with the failed experiment's spoiling of a planned triumphant story. Ronnie is a journalist reporting the events for Particle magazine. She is recording the work on video and there is a plan for a book, the climax of which will be a successful teleportation of Brundle. To this extent we might read the horrific developments precipitated by the flesh as the thwarting of a projected narrative order as well as a scientific one.

It is into this set of problems concerning the construction of human identity in the present phase of technological systems that the film introduces questions of sexuality. To approach this aspect of the text we might usefully start with Barbara Creed's placing of the film within

the domain of contemporary horror where 'there has been an intensification in the exploration of 'becoming woman'. Creed's argument for The Fly's inclusion is as follows:

> 'In Cronenberg's The Fly, a witty pastiche of the horror genre, "becoming woman" is represented as a true metamorphosis comparable to the one in Kafka's novel. When a woman appears on the scene, the male scientist suddenly realises why his experiments are not working - he is ignorant of the flesh, the body. Woman signifies carnal pleasure: man is intellectual, remote from the body. She awakens his libido, he is able to progress with his research. Not until he begins the metamorphosis does he experience bodily pleasures to the full. Through the metaphor of the body, the film draws parallels between the woman and the fly - reinforced by the nightmare in which she gives birth to a gigantic maggot...In the final scene the connections are developed through the mise-en-scène. The metamorphosis is complete and the giant insect advances menacingly towards the "castrated" male victim (he has lost several limbs), recalling a similar scene from The Incredible Shrinking Man in which the hero falls victim to a large black spider - compared through cross-cutting with his wife. Through the early stages of the metamorphosis, the fly is referred to as the "Brundle-fly" - it is a cross between man and fly. Not until the metamorphosis is complete does man fully signify the female - a monstrous fetishized insect'.[26]

If we are fully to account for the film's construction of sexuality, I feel it is important not to lose sight of the more specific

representations of carnal pleasure in the film. In the above quotation, Creed finds the loss of sexual differentiation achieved in the metamorphosis to be synonymous with castration; the feminisation of Brundle is completed by its disavowal in the final image of the 'monstrous fetishized insect'. We need to be wary, though, of simply assuming the validity of Freudian symbolism based on formulations of this kind; it is one thing to cite the use of the black widow in The Incredible Shrinking Man, with its continued cultural connotations of the femme fatale, but it is another matter altogether to conflate the insect with woman as a general proposition, as though in abeyance to some kind of Jungian archetypology.

What is extraordinary about The Fly is the way in which it manages to produce such a sense of ambivalence - occasionally indifference - in respect of sexuality. Ronnie's appearance is indeed the moment and the emotional agent of Brundle's change, yet we have already noted that there are aspects of Brundle which are given associations of conventional unattractiveness; he is naïve and asocial in his habits, dull in his appearance and the architect - in technological terms - of his own identity loss. In this light, the use of woman to signify carnality is functioning to a large extent as the basis of an oppositional discourse which posits the body (however uncontrollable in its own way) as the sign of human values threatened by the machine. Further to this, the narrative avoids entering into the conventional patterns of punishment which are the customary rewards for the femme fatale. There is no attempt in the film to attribute blame to Ronnie, and the finale leaves her intact without any sense of accomplishment on her behalf. Ronnie's final act is one which allows her to possess the phallus (the use of

Stathis's shotgun) while evincing sympathy at her terrible dilemma in using it on Brundle. It is an achievement on behalf of all the actors present that sadness rather than simple revulsion marks the destruction of the Brundle-fly.

Alongside these considerations we must acknowledge the fact that the awakening of Brundle's sexuality moves rapidly past a stage where it can be viewed as beneficial, to become an insatiable appetite rooted in quite specifically masculine patterns of social behaviour. The most obvious example is his conquest of the woman he 'wins' after disfiguring and humiliating an opponent in an arm-wrestling contest. Allied to this is a well-established discourse geared to condemning this kind of masculinity in the figure of Stathis Borans. As Ronnie's ex-lover, his personality is demonstrated to be rooted in pettiness formed as a result of characteristically male anxieties. His jealousy about Ronnie manifests itself in an obsession about her sex life with fantasies of sexual inferiority. In response to Ronnie's description of her scoop with Brundle as being 'onto something huge', Borans says, 'What, his cock?', and he engages in trivial power games like refusing to give up a key to Ronnie's flat.

When Ronnie comes back and finds Borans taking a shower in her flat, he explains that, 'I felt a little scummy'. This is one of several references to him, cast in excremental terms. Elsewhere he is called 'disgusting' by Ronnie, and later she describes him to Brundle as 'the residue of another life' which 'I need to scrape off my shoes'. Brundle's developing machismo is then constructed in relation to this established figure of sexually-obsessed masculinity portrayed in

negative terms, Later on, when Brundle begins to degenerate, Ronnie remarks: 'You look bad, you smell bad', placing him in a comparison with Borans. Conversely, we can say that Borans is compared to the more obviously loathsome aspects of Brundle/the fly.

One way in which this becomes further clarified is by the framing of these negative attributes and images as a portrait of the creating Father. Borans was Ronnie's old science teacher and is thus a kind of father-figure, similarly, we can view Brundle as part of a tradition including Frankenstein and in which he is the hapless father to himself as monster. It is with this in mind that we need to read the nightmare scene where the maggot is given birth to. Rather than it being a straightforward attempt to characterize Ronnie as a monstrous mother, we have to emphasize the fact that it is her nightmare. As a woman who is attempting to rid herself of one unstable macho partner, and who has found herself in love with another, monstrous one, the scene depicts her as the helpless victim of terrible fathers. First, we have the diegetic father, Brundle, to whom she is indebted for the impregnation. Second, there is the symbolic father of Borans, who is present in the room and is holding her hand in a manner traditionally (these days) assigned to the husband. Third, we have Cronenberg himself playing the role of the attending gynaecologist, and who may also be read as the creating father of the entire film: the artist as monster.

When Brundle starts to shed parts of his body, we experience an inevitable mixture of revulsion and curiosity (what will he become?), but, despite the fact that the loss is quite clearly shown to involve

a literal castration, the film fails to develop any real attempt to restore or redress this loss of patriarchal power. This is in part what makes the film so extraordinary. Due to the basic formulation in which the other is accommodated, rather than expunged after isolation and opposition, then the result may be not as the intrusion of the monstrous feminine, so much as the elimination of the monstrous masculine (In fact Brundle's desire to run himself and the pregnant Ronnie simultaneously through the telepod to fuse them in the 'ultimate family' indicates a continued willingness to extend this state of affairs).

What emerges is, to a limited extent, the movement towards a subject which is clearly constructed within horrific discourses, but which is far from perceiving those discourses as a straightforward feminization process. Not only does it involve the removal of an undesirable and aggressive masculinity, but it fails to pursue any restoration of the original, paternal past; the solution Brundle proposes would involve only the amelioration of the fly's genetic contribution and would dilute his identity even further with other humans rather than restoring his own. To this may be added the earlier mentioned situation wherein his progressive physical decay is accompanied by a tolerance for his new condition that is unique in the horror film; in expressing his intentions of becoming the first insect politician Brundle suggests a constituency of the monstrous that is unique.

It is these considerations which make The Fly a far richer film than can be surmised from an exploration that utilizes criteria restricted by conventional articulations of sexual identity. Although

tantalizingly suggestive of the AIDS phenomenon at certain levels - the fusion of the alien material with that of the subject is one of the most obvious - we need to be very cautious in reducing what is a complex text to the most simple of reflection fictions. There is almost a sense in which AIDS, as a metaphor, was a disease waiting since much of the framework of ideas into which it has been inserted, had already been anticipated in the earlier work of Cronenberg. Unlike a text such as Fatal Attraction which drew much of its sensationalism from a capacity to evoke the anti-promiscuity theme of the reactionary component of AIDS culture, the stature of The Fly can only improve from an eventual cure of the disease, and its significance genuinely clarified.

Our final area of exploration may be understood as the obverse of the preceding analysis. In the former, we have partly explored the construction of a human subject which may be reducible to data, transmissible, miscible etc. A coeval development finds the human subject capable of construction from the artificial; we are now imaginable as the product of technology rather than its producer. Another way in which our prior grip on the world of objects around us has been loosened is in the advances made in cybernetic and electronic systems and their rapid advance in the domestic space and into everyday consideration. Our relationship with technology has taken a turn in which its previously passive and objectifiable state is losing ground to a new inter-active condition. In an interesting discussion of the significance of cybernetic developments for the contemporary subject, Bill Nichols writes:

'[I]n cybernetic systems, the concept of "text" itself

> undergoes substantial slippage. Although a textual element can still be isolated, computer-based systems are primarily interactive rather than one-way, open-ended rather than fixed. Dialogue, regulated and disseminated by digital computation, de-emphasises authorship in favour of 'messages-in-circuit' that take fixed but effervescent, continually variable form. The link between message and substrate is loosened: words on a printed page are irradicable; text on a VDT (video display terminal) is readily altered. The text conveys the sense of being addressed to us. The message-in-circuit is both addressed to and addressable by us; the mode is fundamentally interactive or dialogic'.[27]

The machine's interactivity with us elevates it to a new role in our understanding of the world and provides the engine of new fantasies of identity loss. Nichols refers to the term 'cyborg' coined by Norbert Wiener as a word that suitably 'encapsulates the new identity which, instead of seeing humans reduced to automata, sees simulacra which encompass the human elevated to the organic'. For Nichols, the central metaphors of the cybernetic imagination are,

> 'not only the human as an automated but intelligent system, but also automated intelligent systems as human, not only the simulation of reality but also the simulation of reality'.[28]

Fantasies of artificially constructed humanity and intelligence are not new, feating in the science fiction film from at least Metropolis (Fritz Lang:1926) and its creation of the mischievous robot Maria, and in the novel from Karel Capek's R.U.R. published in 1922. An

extremely thorough and well-informed section of The Visual Encyclopedia of Science Fiction is careful to isolate the two tendencies of this tradition into robots/androids, and cyborgs, which properly belong to the domain of the cybernetic and computer-technology. The former robotic tendency (an android is a robot of human appearance) has, despite fantasies of uprisings and machine identity, developed out of utility needs which place the robot in a far less threatening position in respect of any challenge to human identity:

> 'It might be easy for the newcomer to confuse the science fiction development of computers with that of robots, but there is a distinct difference. The robot grew out of the original desire to produce a mechanical servant. The computer, on the other hand, grew out of the need to have a faultless and speedy calculator'.[29]

The relegation of the robot to a perpetual sub-class has maintained the same kind of identity for humanity, as has been guaranteed by the racist ideology of imperialism and colonialism. The tendency in speculative fiction has been to postulate identity problems for the robot rather than for us. This, for instance, is the idea behind Lester del Rey's famous Helen O'Loy (1938) where a domestic robot is undone by its emotional attachment to its creator.

The exposure of this ideology and the undermining of the epistemological basis for it are the most powerful achievements of Ridley Scott's Blade Runner (1982) based on the novel Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? (Philip K. Dick:1968). In the film, which is set in a futuristic L.A. colonized by a myriad of sub-cultures, the off-world colonies are explored and defended by androids termed

replicants. The replicants are not allowed freedom on earth and escaped renegades are ruthlessly hunted down by blade runners like Deckard (Harrison Ford). Their slave status, and the racism behind it, is pointed up by the slang reference to the replicants as 'skin jobs'. What the film proceeds to do is to break down the certainties which the humans feel distinguish them from the androids. This entails, first of all, the establishment of the human's reliance upon the tenets of Cartesianism (Deckard=Descartes); the imagery of the film - including its much-criticized pastiche of the film noir mode - is persistent in emphasizing the verifying importance of visual discourses in determining truth and identity; the wise owl with big eyes in Tyrell's apartment; the retinal test for replicant identity determination; the blowing up of the photograph etc. Once this has been achieved, the film goes on to suggest that this experience is indistinguishable from that of the replicants, who are now being programmed with a past of memories. On the one hand, this is augmented by scenes such as the one in which Deckard indulges in the nostalgia of some personal photographs and we/he are compelled to consider whether he would know if they were merely implants rather than real experiences of his past; certainly, some of the people in the pictures are too far in the past to have been experienced first hand. This epistemological queasiness is compounded by a moral and emotional factor, since the colourless Deckard is a pale and uncertain figure in comparison with the tragic magnificence of the replicant leader Roy Batty (Rutger Hauer) who is explicitly alluded to in Christian terms while demonstrating compassion in sparing Deckard's life.

Blade Runner is a much misunderstood work that promises an

intellectual interrogation of human identity yet to be extended into the full modern climate of cybernetic fantasy. While the idea of the cyborg now seems to have a popular currency in the horror film with the important use of such characters in Alien (Ian Holm:dir. Ridley Scott: 1979), Aliens (Lance Henriksen:dir.James Cameron:1986) and The Terminator (Arnold Schwarzenegger:dir.James Cameron:1984), and a cyborg protagonist in RoboCop (Peter Weller:dir.Paul Verhoeven:1987), there appears to be a tendency towards the co-opting of the potential for destabilizing the human identity back into the discursive domain of patriarchy. So far, the implications of the subject's partial constitution by the machine have failed to be fully exploited for their uniquely disturbing possibilities. Instead, there is a clear celebration in certain films, of the machine being taken on board the human body, but dominated and put to use in the service of a new kind of hyper-masculinity.

We cannot be totally surprised at this, since, for all the disqueting features of technological advancement, Americans, in particular, have demonstrated a fascination with the impersonation of machine-like behaviour. This lies quite plainly at the business end of the spectrum in phenomena such as Taylorism, Fordism (mass production) and concepts like the Organization Man, and the profit ethic behind them requires no further clarification. But there are also more general implications about the use of the body-as-machine as an image.

The Body-as-Machine

If the human body has been shown, here, to signify different ways of representing our relation to the world, or our impression of it, then it

has largely been in terms of disunity, loss of control and confusion. But the converse of this process is no less true; the body may also operate as a metaphor of social order. The observation of Mary Douglas is that 'The more value people put on social constraints, the more the value they set on symbols of bodily control'.[30] One of the most plain examples of this might be the cult of physical fitness encouraged by fascists. In alliance with the Aryan ideology of racial purity, with its utilization of conventional physical codes of the pure - whiteness, blonde hair, blue eyes - the Nazi party promoted programmes of health and bodily efficiency, against which the shock of Jesse Owens's triumph at the Munich Olympics must be understood. The totalitarian conception of society embodied in the Hitlerian vision found expression in the image of the body, youthful, vigorous, healthy and muscled; a model of order and submission to discipline and regime.

In explicitly political discourse, the metaphor of disease assumes a position other to society, but treatable; expungable. This is again clear in totalitarian rhetoric. Writing of the application of such mataphors to the aristocracy in eighteenth century France, Sontag comments,

> 'It is hardly the last time that revolutionary violence would be justified on the grounds that society has a radical, horrible illness. The melodramatics of the disease metaphor in modern political discourse assumes a punitive notion: of the disease not as a punishment but as a sign of evil, something to be punished.

Modern totalitarian movements, whether of the right or of the left, have been peculiarly - and revealingly - inclined to

> use disease imagery. The Nazis declared that someone of mixed "racial" origin was like a syphilitic. European Jewry was repeatedly analogized to syphilis, and to a cancer that must be excised. Disease metaphors were a staple of Bolshevik polemics, and Trotsky, the most gifted of all communist polemicists used them with the greatest profusion'.[31]

As far as the cinema goes, the image of the Jews as diseased rats in Der Ewige Jude (1940) offers an immediate point of reference.

To a certain extent it is possible to detect these kind of metaphorical systems at work in the contemporary vengeance movie, especially those where the revenge is aimed at a political group or a country, or at crime and urban terrorism. It is amusing, not to say brilliantly percipient of Martin Scorcese, for Taxi Driver to have anticipated, in 1976, the self-appointed killing machines of the 'eighties - Stallone, Norris, Schwarzenegger and their clones - and to expose their fascist paranoia in advance; Travis Bickle (Robert de Niro) strikes many absurd and worrying postures, but none more memorable than the sight of him engaged in his travesty of the medieval ritual of preparation for battle. Bickle disciplines his body and shaves his head prior to causing a slaughter of characters whose crimes appear, on the whole, to be petty.

Not so for the victims of the contemporary film of vengeance. The urban and Asian/Middle-Eastern enemy of the present is often constructed along principles of propaganda fiction; they are reduced to easily identifiable stereotypes, the recognizable and thus confrontable/deniable other.

If we appear to be some distance from our initial premise about the body and its social significance, it is to provide a reading context for its present contribution as part of a rhetoric of political reaction and reassertiveness. The kind of retribution fantasy played out in films like Rambo (George P. Cosmatos:1986) and Cobra (George P. Cosmatos:1986) or Invasion USA (Chuck Norris:1986) offers reassurance in values long felt to be lost with the collapse of political consensus. The renewed political polarization of the early Reagan years saw the development of scenarios in which a new kind of hero, representative of moral and political authoritarianism - Indiana Jones, Rambo, Braddock and even Superman himself - manages to achieve simple and straightforward solutions to problems usually based on some kind of rescue. What is so satisfying about these narratives, is the reduction of complex political problems to questions of good and evil which can be treated by those prepared to act.

Apart from the quest structure of the revenge narrative (which, as narratives go, is one of the simplest ways of producing existential meaning for alienated heroes), that invites comparison with figures such as the knight, the prepared and cultivated body of the new super-hero suggests a metaphor of control, strength and order compatible with the desired restoration of social discipline. Social reconstruction goes hand in hand with a physical reconstruction of the hero. The most striking feature of the Stallone/Schwarzenegger image is certainly the muscular hypertrophy of the body-builder. Apart from the above metaphorical implications it is also signifying the strength needed and the physical nature of the task at hand; a reaction to the perceived decline of the West under liberalism and legalism.

Returning to our immediate argument, we may now register this phenomenon as relevant to aspects of the body/machine syndrome.

1) The musculature of the body builder suggests, in its order, and in its constructedness, the machine. The hero of the contemporary vengeance film is, as often as not,described as a 'killing machine'. The image of the body of the machine is compounded by the fondness for high-tech weaponry and total ease with it, and a mechanical economy of hand-to-hand combat movements and techniques (post kung-fu cinema) which mime the efficiency of robotic movement.

2) In terms of machine behaviour, or logic, the 'killing machine' idea offers a convenient escape from moral and ethical debate. In the face of the 'doomsday device', debate is irrelevant; the only solution is not to offend in the first place. The protagonist takes on the dehumanized logic of the machine.

This points to an ambivalence perceived around the man/machine or cyborg concept. It may be a potential source of unease, of identity lost or blurred in the world of the technological, but it may also be turned around and incorporated into fantasies of super-achievement in a physical sense. This is an inversion of the subject conceived as helpless victim of technology, to one in which the subject is in control of, or more than equal to that technology. This is a turn-around which can quite easily be detected in the continuing series of Rambo films. In First Blood (Ted Kotcheff:1982), John Rambo (Sylvester Stallone) is depicted as a killing machine constructed/ programmed at home and fine-tuned in Vietnam. The playing out of the narrative is one in which a revenge is exacted on the parent culture for dehumanizing the hero - he replays the Vietnam War in the

woodland of an American smalltown. James Cameron's script for the sequel (Rambo) still emphasizes the technological aspects of the story but by the third film, Rambo III (Peter MacDonald:1988), the backdrop of the Afghan War provides a politically black and white scenario into which the Rambo figure is sent on a straight rescue mission. In this film, the hero as killing machine is fully accepted as an unproblematic issue. Any ambiguities deriving from suggestions of dehumanization are dispensed in favour of celebrating the myth of the superman.

What scarcely needs to be added is that this reconstruction of the hero is also quite unashamedly a reconstruction of masculinity with an exaggeration of many of its conventional codes of representation. Given the threat to categories of sexuality which lies at the centre of much of the modern horrific, it is unsurprising that avenues of phallic reassertiveness have appeared. Unlike the kind of identity threat we have seen operating in the text of The Fly, where the subject is blended with the machine in a state of equivalence (two aspects of the same piece of software), there are opportunities for the less introspective use of hardware-orientated cyborg fiction to reassert the masculinity of the superman. This is especially evident in low-budget efforts like Humanoid Defender (Ron Satlof:1985) and The Vindicator (Jean-Claude Lord:1986), and in narratives that utilize the cyborg figure to reassert social order as in The Wraith (Mike Marvin: 1986) and Eliminators (Peter Manoogian:1986) which could hardly involve a more concerted effort than its heroic team of 'Mandroid, Mercenary, Scientist and Ninja'.

At the same time, this conservative potential has been noted - implicitly at least - and answered by more ambitious film-makers who have sought to provide some kind of interrogation or foregrounding of the problem. In a modest way, Retaliator (Allan Holzman)1986) manages to emphasize the assumptions which underlie the former types of narrative by placing the cyborg's technological phallicism at the disposal of a woman. A stereotype figure calculated to arouse a complex of male anxieties, a female terrorist, is captured by the CIA and converted into a cyborg. Supposedly, reprogrammed to infiltrate her former bases of operations, the terrorist (Sandahl Bergman) regains a portion of her previous identity and commences to seek revenge. Although the film's script finally succumbs to the restoration of the patriarchal order, it does so while exercising a considerable amount of irony, not the least of which is in pitting the terrorist woman against Robert Ginty. Ginty's reputation lies solely in the exploitation market, where he achieved a brief cult status by playing the role of The Exterminator (James Glickenhaus:1980), one of the first of the 'killing machine' urban vengeance films and the source of much imitation.

The Terminator

A far more systematic and successful effort is James Cameron's The Terminator (1984). In the future, the machines have taken over completely. Only a few human beings survive, and their tenuous resistance movement is threatened by a race of killer cyborgs created by the machines specifically to exterminate them. The resistance exists due to the efforts of John Connor and, as a convenient way of pre-empting his success, the machines send a cyborg (Arnold Schwarze-

negger) back into our present to kill his mother (Linda Hamilton) before he is even born.

The cyborg, eerily portrayed by the hyper-muscular Schwarzenegger, is an impenetrable and virtually indestructible man-machine. As a monstrous figure from the future the cyborg is initially placed in a straight opposition with the present, but the relationship of the two is complicated as the narrative develops by two main axes of association:

a) An ambivalence about the machine as a source of both pleasure/convenience and of horror/destructiveness.

b) The specific use of the monstrous machine image in relation to questions of sexuality.

The relation of future to present, of course, does imply a notion of causality despite the developmental hiatus which the notion of time travel confers. This is made explicit, in terms of the consequence of present technology, by mise-en-scène and editing. First of all, the film can be said to be more than usually emphatic in its use of present-day technological imagery; cars, lorries, motorbikes, VDU's, telephones, hi-fi's. They are insisted upon both by repetition, and quite subtle narrative devices.

Overall, the fascination with technology in the present is qualified by mostly negative associations:

a) The cyborg is easily able to walk into a shop and purchase a laser-sighted pistol to assassinate Sarah Connor.

b) The sight of a drilling machine on tracks acts as a point of association (by way of a dissolve transition) for Kyle (Michael Biehn) to engage in a nightmarish reverie from his (future) memory, in which hunter-killer machines on tracks trundle over a landscape littered with human skeletons in search of new victims.

c) The acceptance of high-tech, into the routines of our daily existence, is given a highly destructive presence, often accompanied by a sharply ironic sense of black humour. Notably, this is established as a partial cause of the deaths of Sarah's friends and her two namesakes who are killed in error by the cyborg.

i) The personal hi-fi which Sarah's friend wears as an almost permanent fixture, is not only given debasing connotations when she wears it during lovemaking, but is also the reason she fails to hear the cyborg's presence in the house; it demolishes a room while killing her boyfriend and then kills her.

ii) The telephone recurs as a source of trouble and bad news: It is to the phone book that the cyborg immediately turns on arriving at the presumed neighbourhood of his target. Looking up Sarah Connor, he dispassionately proceeds to eliminate, in alphabetical order, all three people of that ame. Later on, in a clever piece of black humour, the cyborg locates Sarah's whereabouts due to a message she has left on the answerphone for her friend. As the cyborg stands over the corpse of the dead friend, the message is preceded by the pre-recorded wisecrack: 'Hi there! You're talking to a machine, but don't be shy. It's O.K.: machines need love too'.

d) There are digs at the fascination the machine has in comtemporary pop-culture, and its status in the realm of style. A disco club,

in which Sarah attempts to hide from the cyborg, is aptly named 'Tech Noir', and its glossy high-tech decor and 'metal' dance music provide a background for a bloodbath wrought by the cyborg.

It is around the question of style that we can introduce the technological relation to sexuality in the narrative. There are ways in which connections are made between the popular appeal of technology/ science and the social construction of certain images and ideals of masculinity:

a) It is suggested that one of the reasons Sarah endures off-handed treatment by her boyfriend, is that he possesses a Porsche. Again, the negativity associated with much of the film's technology, is emphasized by his use of the answerphone to cancel their date, rather than having to enter into a personal confrontation.

b) Sarah answers a phone call from her flatmate's boyfriend (Rick Rossovitch) who mistakenly assumes it is his partner on the line. His ensuing description of what he is going to do with her in bed is placed within the technological-style thematic of the narrative by the mise-en-scène; he is wearing a T-shirt that bears the face of Albert Einstein (this is also ironic to the extent that he is given a role that rarely deviates from a portrayal of the oafish). The exchange then serves to pre-figure the second of Sarah's two misinterpreted calls, which is with the cyborg (in this instance, the cyborg is deliberately impersonating Sarah's mother).

c) The cyborg is itself the central image of technological monstrosity, and the highly memorable presence of Arnold Schwarzenegger is developed within the terms of the conspicuously macho. It is amusing that a supposedly unfeeling cyborg should be the most stylish

character in the story. Gradually, the cyborg - who arrives naked into our present - acquires a highly co-ordinated look based on punk and biker culture. Riding a motorbike, he is dressed in leather jacket and boots, and, via the diegetic motivations of a fire and a car crash, a bristly punk haircut and dark glasses (the latter to conceal his exposed electromechanism). Apart from the obvious masculinity which the performance and presence of Schwarzenegger confers upon the monster, it is heard using idiomatic tough guy language ('Fuck you, asshole!') and is introduced to us early on by way of its destruction of three street punks who threaten it. This latter is a cliché of the urban vengeance fantasy best remembered from the Charles Bronson '<u>Death Wish</u>' films.

Emerging from these details, is an ambivalence constructed by the tension between the ostensible denunciation of the technological - its establishment within terms of the monstrous - and the implicit acknowledgement of its attractiveness as part of contemporary masculine discourse. The parallel misunderstood phone calls offer one example in which the relation of Sarah to the cyborg is privileged; it suggests that her contact with the monster may be understood, perhaps, as a matter of attraction as well as repulsion. A further set of textual details adds to the view that the cyborg is, to some extent, the terrifying exaggeration of the kind of technological machismo that Sarah has found appealing in her date:

a) The cyborg's intrusion into her life coincides with her disappointment on being let down by the date.

b) Sarah keeps a large pet lizard whose reptilian associations spill over to the killer-cyborg. After being let down, Sarah says, 'You

still love me' to the lizard, and its surprise appearance in the kitchen, which shocks her flatmate, is coincident with the arrival of the Terminator who parallels the surprise and kills her.
c) Prior to this, Sarah and her flatmate have both dressed themselves up for their dates. Posing together in front of the mirror, Sarah comments that their images are: 'More than mortal man desires'.

To this degree we may understand the jokey answerphone pre-recording - 'Machines need love too' - as part of this continuity of ideas.

The Terminator is remarkably thorough in working out this ambivalence. Not only is the appeal of the technologically macho made clear on a thematic level, but also, our own involvement with the film is brought into question. Much of the film's appeal is contrived by exploiting the figure of the cyborg. Apart from its stylish presentation, its death-defying unstoppability is as much a source of fascination as it is horror; often we are given scenes in which we follow the cyborg rather than the central characters in order to focus on its capabilities, specialities and make-up. This is compounded by direct point-of-view shots in which we witness the world through the computer-assisted, data-superimposed visuals of the cyborg. In one particular example this involves an exhilarating Steadicam rush down an alley where we share its pursuit of the protagonists.[32]

Ultimately, Sarah's positive image, as bearer of the future salvation of the human race, is achieved by a corresponding triumph over destructive forces of technological machismo. She learns to be the source of the future revolutionary's knowledge and skills. If the

plot device requires her to be impregnated and inspired herself by a man, it is also true that Sarah's eventual defeat of the Terminator is effected after that man, Kyle, has been totally incapacitated.[33] Cameron's film is successful in maintaining a coherence in its political argument partly by its, at the moment, old-fashioned construction of subjectivity. It presents us with images of the technologically threatened subject - of cyborgs, of future holocausts and the betrayal of everyday household appliances - but, despite the kinds of ambivalence mentioned above in respect of the fascinations of high-tech, the construction of the horrific takes place by maintaining a relatively conventional distance between self and Other. If there are ways, as I have argued, in which that distance is qualified by the raising of certain fantasies of attraction, these, nonetheless, take place through organization around orthodox constructions of masculinity and feminity that in themselves retain their traditional, existential basis. Returning to our introductory argument, we may note the film's success in using these structures to attack contemporary masculine fantasies of the high-tech superman. In this light The Terminator may be contrasted with the more contradictory RoboCop, the more typically post-modern of these two cyborg films where the man/machine emerges as an unqualified hero.

RoboCop

In a Detroit of the future, urban disorder borders on total anarchy. A demoralized police force on the verge of striking is about to be superceded by the Security cepts branch of Omni Consumer Products ('We practically are the military'). In order to pave the way for the planned urban renewal of Delta City, a RoboCop programme is implemented in which Murphy (Peter Weller) - a new police transfer who

is shot, literally to pieces by Chicago's crime-boss, Clarence Boddicker (Kurtwood Smith) - has his dead body reconstructed into a cyborg policeman - RoboCop. Although his mind is wiped and programmed only to do his job, Murphy gradually recaptures elements of his identity while exposing the film's villain, Boddicker, to be part of a conspiracy with the Vice-President of OCP, Dick Jones (Ronny Cox).

Initially, RoboCop appears to be a satire on the perceived breakdown of modern values in the age of the electronic media. More than any other popular film of recent years - and it is very successful - it shows a deliberately-foregrounded awareness of the post-modern dystopia: a disaffected and fragmented social milieu dominated by corporate powers, and ubiquitous television screens on which the tragic and the banal co-exist with equal billing as entertainment. Our introduction to the film is via the news programme that will be referred to throughout the film. Two presenters conduct a permanently cheerful introduction to current affairs, largely disasters of considerable size, where a portrait of our own worst social tendencies and situations is present as the seed of truth behind the exaggerations. Various montages give a media coexistence to police killings, car adverts, a new family board game 'Nuk'em' and sales pitches for voluntary organ replacements (the new Yamaha 'sports heart'). Elsewhere in the film the most popular comedy show on television seems to be watched by everyone (especially criminals), with its mindless offerings of large-breasted women, and constantly repeated catch-phrase of 'I'll buy that for a dollar'. Generally, the impression of a world in which everything is understood and processed by the media in predigested form, is promoted by the news programmes' slogan of,

'Give us three minutes and we'll give you the world'.

As a setting for these impressions, the milieu of the film is divided between the spotless, antiseptic high-tech interiors of corporation buildings and hospitals, pent-houses and laboratories, and the run-down neighbourhoods of 'old Detroit' with its grimy streets and disused industrial plants from the pre-electronics era. This schema is not unlike that of film noir which shares an iconography derived from the world of the impersonal and public, rather than the intimate and the domestic; in each case the idea of family which might validate the latter is an impossibility or feature of the past. Added to this is a population composed largely of power-hungry executives, scientists, police and psychopathically violent criminals.

Into this we may place our initial impression of the film's hero, Murphy, an amiable family man whose first day on duty leads to his death. Potentially, Murphy's conversion into RoboCop could be one of the most disquieting assaults upon the subject yet, with the cyborg/ hero as a bleak and horrific impression of the confused post-modern self:

a) Murphy is in the film for only 20 minutes when he is demolished by Boddicker and his men. His body is horrifically shot away and he dies on the operating table after being shot through the temple. Our audience identification with Murphy is complete in this respect, sharing not only his fading memories as he dies, but also a black and soundless screen when he dies. At this point we have been treated to one of the most brutal assaults imaginable upon the process of viewer identification.

b) Murphy's return as RoboCop is a restoration of the screen image, but now in the manner of a televisual view of the world - scanning lines, multiple image facility, grids, data superimposition, thermographic vision and record and replay functions.

c) Our hero is no longer Murphy. His memory has been erased, and, like software, a new set of ideas or commands programmed in. Notably, this is supervised by a set of 'prime directives':

ONE: SERVE THE PUBLIC TRUST

TWO: PROTECT THE INNOCENT

THREE: UPHOLD THE LAW

FOUR: (CLASSIFIED).

Unlike The Fly, this demolition of the subject is not the basis for an interrogation of our conventional categories of identity. Instead it is the starting point for a reconstruction of the hero as technological superman. In this fantasy the bodily reconstruction of the protagonist is the sign and agency of the restoration of social order.

The film's narrative offers the simultaneous solution to the criminal corruption of society (Boddicker) and corporatism (Dick Jones at OCP) with a restoration of Murphy's identity and memory. As such we lose the confused or equivalent admixture of self/other which is central to an understanding of The Fly, in favour of a human identity in command of machinery in service to a positive redundancy of phallic assertiveness. The apparently literal castration of the hero returns through a fetishizing of the body/machine.[34] Instead of the body being threatened by the machine, it is replaced and made more efficient -

perfect even. First of all, it, like the irrepressible Terminator, offers a transcendence of existential mortal fears of death. In the words of Vivian Sobchack,

> 'Within the technological culture we inhabit, the cinematic representation of death is inscribed and understood as a "technical phenomenon" rather than a lived-body experience ...It is the visible mortification of or violence to the existential, intentional, and representable lived-body which stands as the index of dying, and the visible cessation of the body's intentional behaviour which stands as the index of death'.[35]

The titanium 'total body prosthesis' of RoboCop denies this, and repeatedly demonstrates an imperviousness in the face of the gunfire which initially killed Murphy. This, now supervised by the prior, masculine identity of Murphy, is controlled and celebrated.

Consolidating this fascination with the new body (the superhuman facilities and firepower of which are exhilaratingly displayed),[37] is a series of textual references that imply the rejection of mortality and a desire to become the superman/cyborg:

a) The film deploys a consistent use of religious symbolism characteristic of the director's work.[37] The shooting of Murphy involves a kind of crucifixion where his hands are shot away, and this takes place after Murphy says to Boddicker, 'Boddy, I think you're slime', implying a disgust with his own mortality. After this we are given a literal resurrection from the dead in the new 'immortal' form. After destroying the evil Father of Dick Jones, Murphy/RoboCop is accepted by the good father 'the Old Man' (Dan O'Herlihy) who is the god-like creator.

b) Murphy is questioned by his new partner, Lewis (Nancy Allen) as to why he engages in a minor demonstration of pistol-twirling skill. After explaining that it is a mannerism of his son's favourite TV superhero, T.J. Lazer, a futuristic super-cop. After a moment, Murphy admits, 'O.K. I get a kick out of it', setting up the idea that he secretly desires to become the kind of figure he does in the film.[38]

Murphy's reclamation of his identity is developed as a restoration of patriarchal/social Law. The sense of nostalgia for his previous existence is very powerfully effected by the film, via flashback memories and a particularly poignant visit to his former home. Persuasively accompanied by Basil Poledouris's original score, RoboCop wanders around the now-deserted home with repeatedly-triggered memories of his family that serve to evoke tremendous feelings of loss. In a provocative article on the post-modern horrific and feminism, Barbara Creed points to the nostalgia mode of many recent films being an attempt to mourn the loss of a patriarchal value system that was once clear cut but now finds its legitimacy threatened, that - in the nostalgia mode of film noir reconstructions - 'the "missing past" which lies at the heart of these films is that which once validated the paternal signifier'.[39] It is this kind of loss that is highlighted by the focusing upon past fragments - for instance, the cup left in the home which (now broken) reads 'World Class Husband'.

There is a profound contradiction at the core of this evocation which is in the tradition of all those characteristically-American fictions that celebrate the 'flight from women'; that the dominant ideology celebrates a contradictory set of cultural myths of the

idealized family into which the idealized male, man-of-action, the loner and hunter could not possibly fit. (For a lucid exploration of this in the popular cinema, see Robin Wood: Ideology, Genre, Auteur).[40] Like Rip Van Winkle, whose escape from a 'termagant' wife is effected by going into a sleep until she no longer exists, Murphy's new, triumphantly pahllic urban avenger is freed from the shackles of a family life by a fortuitous death. Unlike the traditional revenge plot like Death Wish (Michael Winner:1974) where the woman/family is destroyed, the scenario of RoboCop evades the future possibility of having to reconcile its hero once again with some form of romantic interest. Thus a contradiction of feelings exists between mourning the past of the paternal Murphy and celebrating the phallic vengeance of the individualist RoboCop. At one moment the mise-en-scène playfully attempts to indicate this with a photographic fragment of Murphy and his family, which - in concert with the film's religious thematics - shows his son dressed as a Devil for Halloween Night.

Ultimately, RoboCop celebrates independence from the demands of a relationships with women while ironically acting as a showcase for high-tech fantasies of masculinity. There are moments when this is parodied, as when RoboCop shoots between the legs of a woman rape victim to hit the groin of the rapist behind her, or when it is given undertones of homosexuality - a store-robber repeatedly exclaims nothing but the words: 'Fuck me, Fuck me...' at the cyborg when confronted, but the overall sense of the film is that RoboCop, having recovered his identity, can save society. Initial attacks on society are explained in the film by the removal of the bad elements, the corporation of OCP is legitimated by the apparently benign presence

of the good Father whose final comment is 'Nice shooting son, what's your name?', to which Murphy - with his first smile - says 'Murphy'. The identity having been restored within conventional discourses of masculinity puts to rest any kinds of potential threats from the idea of the cyborg; this is technology on patriarchy's terms. From this analysis of the film we can see how the threat to, or destruction of, the body that symptomatically indicates our relation to new technology and its effect upon our relation to the world, is already finding an expression of a more conservative nature. That certain technological fantasies are apparently capable of consolidating established social identities as much as they may challenge them, drawing upon a reconstruction rather than a destruction of the body as a primary metaphor.

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26 Barbara Creed, From Here to Modernity : Feminism and the Postmodern, in Screen Vol.28, No.2, p.61, Spring 1987.

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28 Ibid., p.35.

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30 Mary Douglas, Natural Symbols, op.cit., p.16.

31 Sontag, op.cit., p.84. Also, for a recent continuation of this tendency note this account of the supporters of Eugene Terreblanche, the neo-Nazi leader of the South Adrican A.W.B. In an article entitled Ramboer, which comments on the sex appeal of the extreme right we are told that, 'Invariably /Terreblanche/ is flanked by the posse of young men who comprise his personal guard - the aquila. They are usually blond, often mustachioed, and invariably extremely butch. The overall impression is of a sea of khaki and black leather on bronzed masculine flesh'. Daily Telegraph, Wednesday, January 11, 1989.

32 This technique was first developed for use in the film Westworld for an account of this, see Michael Crichton, Electronic Life, Understanding the Computer Age, London, Arrow, 1984, pp.54-56.

33 a) This situation is repeated in Cameron's Aliens, 1986, with Sigourney Weaver as the independent heroine and, once again, an incapacitated Michael Biehn watching her actions from the sidelines.

b) There is also a case to be made for the film's use of images to compare Biehn/Kyle with Terminator. In an Oedipal reading of the text, Lillian Necakov argues that, 'The parallels, in fact, have two major functions:

33 (cont.) b) (cont.)
i) to show that the Terminator is, in fact, a product that man himself has created in man's own macho image, and
ii) to set Reese (Biehn) apart and to show that man need not fill that stereotypical role'.

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34 For a thorough account of the investment of the body with phallic mystique, see Richard Dyer, Don't Look Now : The Male Pin-Up, in Screen Vol.23, Nos.3-4, October 1982, esp. pp.68-73.

35 Vivian Sobchack, Inscribing Ethical Space : Ten Propositions on Death, Representation, and Documentary, in Quarterly Review of Film Studies, Fall, 1984, p.287. Sobchack offers some broad categories described by her as a 'semiotic phenomenology of death as it is made significant for us through the medium and troopes of documentary film attempts to describe, thematize and interpret death as it appears on the screen, and is experienced by us as indexically real, rather than iconocally or symbolically fictive' ...283. Her observations are applicable, in part, to our metaphorically-inclined project, and ultimately the reality of the body's indexical significance is always bound up with its symbolic, representational presence.

36 For instance, when the entire practice range of police officers gradually cease fire to reveal to us, on the soundtrack, the dominating sound of RoboCop's huge firearm. This is repeatedly indulged throughout the film, notably by the fancy twirling trick that - retained in the RoboCop repertoire - is the signature by which Lewis recognizes Murphy as RoboCop.

37 The Fourth Man (1984) and Flesh and Blood (1985) are the two instances of the director's work that I have seen, and they are - without entering into an analysis here - undoubtedly impossible to read fully without taking this kind of theme into account.

38 This is the real significance of the phallic 'signature' mentioned in Note 36.

39 Creed, op.cit., p.54.

40 Robin Wood, Ideology, Genre, Auteur, in Film Comment, January/February 1977.

CONCLUSION

From our initial examination of horror critical literature, we noted the inadequacy of the empirical and taxonomic accounts; the attempt to provide all-embracing definitions based around character types and iconographical continuities appears less plausible with every addition to the genre's current output. This is not to say that there is no place for these kinds of traditional features of genre studies, rather, it is to emphasize the need to qualify any suggestions in this area with historically-informed analyses. We must be careful not to reify the notion of aesthetic continuity to the level of an autonomous practice capable of exerting its own, independent influence over the years. The extent to which iconographical traditions persist is the extent to which they are still viable in a functional sense, that is, whether they are still capable of conveying the central horrific values of the genre. Based on the foregoing chapters we can make some basic observations in this area.

The use of the Gothic inonographical tradition is no longer sustainable without some kind of drastic ironic qualification, presented either at arm's length by parody and pastiche, or contrasted with the horror of the present day in a manner that renders them quaint. If Adorno could envision no poetry after Auschwitz, then neither could the horror film find much of value in the Gothic character types after

Lee Harvey Oswald. As Targets so neatly tells us, the Old Dark House and Boris Karloff are positively reassuring by comparison with the bland exterminations of the urban sniper, whose origins may be the American middle classes rather than the European aristocracy. In this development, an iconography of the merely ordinary is virtually no iconography at all, being apparent in Bogdanovitch's film by the use of formal opposition against the Gothic. Where this iconography manages to achieve some kind of weight through repetition, it is either in the use of setting - as in the summer camps and woods, or school proms of the teen slasher movies - or, in the more deliberately self-conscious and hermetically restricted works of a particular auteur such as Romero or Cronenberg.

If there is a central image in the genre today, it is that of the body being assaulted, coming to pieces or in decay, and what tentative iconography we can find among this, is that of the tumour, the chimera and the cyborg. If I appear to be negligent in avoiding mention of the zombie, it is because it, too, has changed with the times. So much so, that - as discussed in Chapter Three - its current centrality in certain films allows it a new role and significance that cannot be understood as part of a continuity of meaning. The present image of the living dead is to be understood from its widely accepted rebirth in 1968 (Night of the Living Dead),[1] where its image of massive decay marks the true beginning of the genre's current obsession with the body.

Of course, it is evident that the body's vulnerability is exploited as an image throughout the whole of our culture. A contemporary

fascination with physical violence and its explicit consequences is conveyed through cultural discourses which far exceed the limits of the horror film. What is different about the horror film is its total insistence upon questions of the body; a steady interest in its make-up and breakdown is at the core of the 'splatter film'. It is this that the films are somehow 'about'. Through pointing up the importance of this material to their popular and critical understanding I hope to have made this evident. Consequently, we must use this as an indicator of the genre's general significance. In treating the body as centrally important we need not abolish questions of evaluation (although that remains largely an implicit feature of this thesis), but these should develop from aesthetic, moral or ideological bases, and not from ill-defined and common-sensical social judgements on whether it is proper to display those aspects of the body ordinarily concealed from us by costume, institutions and epidermis. Before entering into any such areas we need, first, to take a positive look at the organization of this bodily material into what are quite distinctive tropes, connecting it with contextual social discourses by which we construct our understanding of the body.

The other main argument isolated from the body of horror critical and theoretical writing, is that whatever the genre has superficially appeared to be doing, it has always been preoccupied with the question of identity. The central affective strategy of the genre is predicted on an exploitation of the perceived uncertainties in the subject's constitution as a social and psychological being. From a consideration of the critical literature, whether it is devoted to Gothic literature (Miyoshi), Weimar fantasy (Kracauer) or American horror of the

'seventies (Wood), the underlying theme developed is that of the threat to the subject as a unified phenomenon. Textually, this has provided the basis for an understanding of the genre's major narrative,and thematic tendencies as founded on an opposition between an established or received 'normality', and a monster apparently unrelated to, but threatening, the security of that normality. Whether that normality is inflected towards the social or the psychological has been a distinguishing feature of both the genre itself and critical accounts of it in its major phases since the emergence of the Gothic in 1764 (see Chapter One). But in each case there has been a progressive problematization of that basic formal and thematic dualism, whereby the earlier, implicitness of the monster's connection to normality has been displaced by a growing self-reflexivity that allows recognition of what that relationship's real significance is. This is marked in the literature by the acceptance of the monster as derived from normality and as a cultural/psychological Other which we are consciously attempting to deny, but which represents aspects of ourselves and our culture that, even in their loathsomeness, fascinate us and demand our acknowledgement.

The establishment of this principle in the emergence of the Gothic is developed by Rosemary Jackson who connects the point that 'the demonic found a literary form in the midst of Augustian ideals of classical harmony, public decorum and reasonable restraint' with Michel Foucault's account of the rise of the mental institution as a 'fortres of unreason' in the same period. Jackson argues that these institutions 'were both created <u>by</u> the dominant classical order and constituted a hidden pressure <u>against</u> it', and that this opposition

represents

> 'A massive shift in ideas of order and unreason during the eighteenth century [which] effected a radical transformation of man's perception of himself and of his theories of knowledge. It is in this period that inherited patterns of meaning are lost, with the result that notions of 'reality', of 'human nature', of 'wholeness' are dissolved'.[2]

The emergence of the Gothic can be seen as the narrative attempt to articulate this dilemma wherein the 'wholeness' of the subject is challenged within the context of a relatively reassuring formal framework. It is a process which has introduced the image of the double as the anthropomorphic fictional means of conveying the epistemological dualism that lies at the heart of these works, and it marks the commencement of a long and illustrious use of this narrative device. Running throughout texts and commentary, this has persisted as an, often unexamined, essential feature of the genre, more or less assumed to have an unlimited future validity, with self and Other permitting a kind of security in their capacity to confirm each other. If the Other has taken on a range of different associations over the years, its essential aspect, in Robin Wood's opinion, is its relation to normality and this has remained largely one that has been conceptualized and represented by a binary opposition. Perhaps the major change that can be registered is the genre's continual movement towards non-metaphysical explanations; the devaluation of the supernatural has witnessed the rise of the secular monster, with its major incarnations of technology and psychology. This has contributed enormously to the problematization of the subject, forcing explanations of our anxieties to be sought within the territories of our own

society and self. Nevertheless, the basic duality remains as a structuring principle which, according to Frederick Jameson, is the foundation for our understanding of good and evil. Our relation to the Other is governed, in his view, by ethics and not metaphysics,

> 'about whom the essential point to be made is not so much that he is feared because he is evil; rather he is evil <u>because</u> he is Other, alien, different, strange, unclean and unfamiliar'.[3]

From this we may see the way that the double and each manifestation of the Other has maintained its prominence in the horror genre despite its secularization.

Returning to our claims about the body's centrality in modern horror films, what I have attempted to do is to connect this foregrounding of the body's destruction with the continuing address, within the genre, to issues of subjectivity. In doing so, it has been necessary to emphasize the possible breakdown of former categories of Otherness as historically-specific responses to changes in our understanding of our relation to the world.

First of all, it is established that the body, followong Mary Douglas, has a very special value as a symbol. Capable of conveying notions of boundary, of inside and outside, of mortality, of control and power, or the lack of these things, it is used by societies throughout history to articulate a sense of their relation to the world and to construct models of social organization. In particular, the body's metaphorical potential may help to negotiate the areas in which tensions or conflicts of interest between self and society may arise. In Douglas's work this emerges in, for example, avoidance and purification rituals. We need

to be careful at this point about the extent to which we can share Douglas's claims. Our society cannot be understood, in its use of ritual, to be strictly comparable to the primitive societies commented on by her. Our purchase on tradition grows increasingly contingent upon the demands of the market and the media through which we understand the world; in such a volatile and culturally fragmented circumstance we cannot expect to examine the products of popular culture with the same expectations of authenticity as we might an African tribe.

Nonetheless, the body continues to ascend to a new level of significance in our culture, crying out for attention and inviting analysis of some kind. In a book which argues for the validity of comparing other societies and cultures with our own in terms of body symbolism, Ted Polhemus states that

> 'The gap between biological reality and social symbol is, in any society or historical era, enormous, and in the attempt to bridge this gap is born the need for all the extraordinary forms of body decoration which are characteristic of human beings'.[4]

In attempting to pursue the development of the body as a horrific image in the horror film I have engaged in analyses of individual films only on the basis that the kinds of image and structure they use is typical of broad trends, or important modifications of them. In this way, I hope to have avoided the danger of basing claims for the trends of a genre (and its relation to social conditions) upon misreadings of the possible significances of an isolated case. If I have also leaned heavily upon the work of David Cronenberg it is because his

sensibility is, for all its intellectualism and self-consciousness, as much, if not more, in tune with the genre's present concerns than most. Moreover, he has, in exploring its present limit , provided a convenient point from which to raise issues about the relation of the genre to broader cultural problems. In this, I have also tried to show the need to admit that the genre, and its figurations of the body, are part of widespread cultural discourses that affect our attitudes to, and understandings of, health, death, disease, cultural and political identity, new technology and self control.

In using Douglas's propositions I have tried to establish that the body is functioning in the horror film to articulate a new perception of the relation of self and society in its most negative aspects. After taking stock of the accumulating force of this process in the rhetoric of the splatter film, I have argued that the significance of the genre's use of visceral imagery is not merely the result of de-sensitization, or the need for us to associate returning repressed values with the idea of the disgusting; rather, it is that it indicates a need to articulate the subject's present condition of threatened integrity. Consequently, this idea was explored by the analysis of a range of texts which demonstrate the variety of this phenomenon. What I am not trying to do is provide a theory which will account for the body's disposition within each and every context. If general claims are made for the body as a symbol, and its relations to horrific subjectivity, this is to admit a tendency of a particular kind that has been developing over a period in which other, more traditional kinds of film are still being made and shown (although an analysis of this type is not invalid for these). The examples chosen are from mainly influential films and

in choosing them a number of overlapping tendencies was established:

a) In the context of a non-transcendent, secular view of life informed by the studies of Philipe Ariès, the body is acting as the ultimate signifier of mortality in an age where death has never been more stringently avoided in western culture. As societies are more rule-bound and highly organized, so are they - in Douglas's thesis - more insistent upon the image of continence in the body - nowhere more so than in the white middle-classes for example. But the morality of the body - the heightened awareness of our physical existence is a constantly threatening reminder of our most fundamental source of potential disorder, and its horrific loss of control is an image that pervades the horror genre.

In one set of readings we saw how this informs the cancer image in the films of David Cronenberg and how this follows from the general comments of Susan Sontag on the potential of diseases as social metaphors. Cancer is established, in her words, as a disease of 'just the body' and capable of functioning as a secular evil. In another instance, we saw the use of the rotting and incontinent body in the trilogy of Romero's zombie films, to articulate an attack upon society's major institutions and structures of power and control; the collapse in the powerbases of patriarchy and capitalism in white society are correlated with the apocalyptic overrunning of that world by the masses of the physically decomposed.

b) Overlapping these discourses is a developing sense of the body, the physical self, as a focal point of control for burgeoning political

systems predicated upon state, corporate and technological power. This integrating of the horrific with the conspiracist in popular fiction is what informs an analysis of Coma, where the paranoid vision of the hospital, as a total institution that represents American society, is the context of pervasive fantasies of the body of the subject being manipulated, quantified, dissected or killed. So established is this discourse that it is sufficient to compromise the text's evident attempt to construct positive female subject positions in keeping with the postulated 'new woman' of post-feminist 'seventies Hollywood. This can be understood as a graphic illustration of the symptomatic response of the subject's progressive unease in the face of its regulation by forces of social control, these being - as Michel Foucault has shown - in themselves a process that has involved a general regulation of the subject characterized by its physical quantification and control. Yet it is just at the point of this symbolic (and actual) regulation of the subject that our most dramatic fantasies of personal loss-of-control occur, as in the body's mockery of scientific/technological systems of order. Whether it is in the disorderly dead of Romero's world, the unforeseen carnal side-effects of Cronenberg's, the disaffected crew of Carpenter's The Thing, the female past/present's pre-emption of technological machismo in The Terminator or Murphy's reassertion of phallic identity in RoboCop. What lies at the heart of all these horror texts is an assault on a subject previously considered or perceived to be unified or boundaried; the problem of their narratives is one which to a greater or lesser extent involves an interrogation of the subject's dilemma, as one experience of social subjectivity is threatened by another, more fragmented, one. It is in the post-modern universe of cybernetics and the simulacral presentation

of reality, of the pastiche and of a past understood through cliché and nostalgic recreation, that the contemporary subject stands. Decentred, and incapable of achieving political understanding due to the complexity of modern capitalism's multi-national and multi-communicational basis, this perception of the world is one obliged to compete with previous, centred models founded on the principle of individualism. In many of the films discussed, a dialogue appears which articulates an attempt to negotiate this problem in some form. These may be generated in the same kinds of manner as contradictions within modern political arguments, between the rights of the individual subject and the rights/directives of the state/society. Foucault suggests this possibility in his observations on the failure of present political theories, commenting that,

> 'the main characteristic of our political rationality is the fact that this integration of the individual in a community or in a totality results from a constant correlation between an increasing individuation and the reinforcement of this totality'.[5]

In other words, while the social forces at work are in many ways constructing the individual as a decentred and non-unified phenomenon, there is, of course, the persistence of myths, images, systems of pleasure and thought which derive their legitimation from an individualist conception of the subject. In the films we have examined, this dialogue is observed to be capable of being inflected decisively to either side of the debate; in The Fly, for instance, the self is lost, blended and irretrievably confused with the Other, whereas in RoboCop the technological Other is eventually recuperated as an agent of reconstructed super-masculinity.

As an attempt to clarify the historical movement from one conception of the subject to the other, I compared and contrasted the two versions of 'The Thing', in order to bring out the significance of this shift for the horror film and the terrorized subject. What was clarified was the way that subjectivity moved from the dualistic, binary or ethical mode, where self and Other are mutually-confirming, commensurate with the ability to distinguish the subject's boundaries with the world, to a situation where the subject is incapable of distinguishing its own social identity. Correspondingly, the monstrous moves from a clearly-defined Other which can be excluded and denied, to a pastiche of a creature that cannot be distinguished from the film's protagonists, and which highlight the fragmented nature of the film's 'society' in a way that is unimaginable in the original.

The body is figuring, then, as a central means of articulating this problem, and many of the genre's present developments must be seen, indeed can only be understood fully, in this light. Jackson has developed this in relation to the literary fantastic, noting that

> 'The many partial, dual, multiple and dismembered selves scattered throughout literary fantasies violate the most cherished of all human unities: the unity of "character"'.[6]

Although the mainstream of American cinema is unlikely to accommodate such a radical challenge to its construction of character (Videodrome and The Fly approach it only to the extent they may be considered major films in an industry sense) the protagonist of popular genre films has, since the late 'sixties, taken a considerable assault upon previously secure aspects of his character. If we take a well-known and trend-setting instance like Bonnie and Clyde (Arthur Penn:1968)

we find, in its sustained attempt to deconstruct the romanticization of the folk-hero, a loss of authority of the characters in determining the events of the narrative and a corresponding loss of moral and ideological stature. In the findings of this thesis, the notorious slow-motion destruction of the protagonist's bodies by machine-gun fire, like that of Peckinpah's final shootout in The Wild Bunch does suggest the beginning of the present paranoid configurations of the horror film (although the latter is complicated by an elatory and celebratory aspect).

As a 'disreputable' or marginal genre, the horror film is perhaps better situated than most for an interrogation or exploitation of this kind of problem, in its ability to justify the destruction of the major symbolic structure through which identity is confirmed. There are some points which can now be made about the significance of the bodily horrific for our general understanding of the cinema.

The Ideal Self

The rise of the modern horror film is suggestively contemporaneous with the attempt to reconsider the psycho-analytical implications of popular cinema by reference to the works of Jacques Lacan. His account of the constitution of the ego through visual discourses raises interesting questions about the way that the cinema constructs its idealized characters for the viewer. His theoretical work in this area has been the inspiration for analyses of narrative cinema that explain its processes of narration as predicated on the attempt to confirm the subject's unity by the organization of visual discourse. Consequently, we must acknowledge the possibility that the horror film's threat to

the subject-as-body might involve the destruction of such an organization.

For Lacan, there is a profound and universal experience in the development of the child's psychological constitution, which occurs in its pre-linguistic stage. At this moment the child's motor functions are inadequate and poorly developed; its physical relation to the world is one of helplessness and dependency. These conditions are actual and are prevailed upon at a crucial moment in which the infant begins to re-interpret its sense of physical being in the world through an Imaginary identification with its mirror image; it develops a sense of unity, wholeness and co-ordination through the visual figure of the self, projected as an ideal Other. According to Lacan,

> 'This jubilant assumption of his specular image by the child at the infans stage, still sunk in his motor incapacity and nursling dependence, would seem to exhibit in an exemplary situation the symbolic matrix in which the I is precipitated in primordial form, before it is objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject'. (The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience).[7]

The resultant effect is one of an idealized sense of coherence with the world as it can be understood through the image of the body. This kind of psycho-spatial model-formation is developed through what Lacan terms the imago, the purpose of which is 'to establish a relation between the organism and its reality - or as they say, between the Innenwelt and the Umwelt'.[8] The development of the subject is organized around a number of such imagos according to the various

developmental phases of the individual. For example, the 'imaginary primordial enclosure formed by the imago of the mother's body; through her we have the cartography drawn by the children's own hand, of the mother's internal empire...' or the paternal imagos, identification with which marks the passage of the child into the Symbolic and 'cultural normativity'.

We should note three crucial aspects of this 'spectacular absorption' which affect us here:

i) The existence of a state of initial disarray, of a period of inchoate and uncentred experience of the world.

ii) The derivation of pleasure by the spectacular mastery of that condition, the production of an Imaginary unity.

iii) The coexistence of a fundamental frustration inherent in the process, since our pleasure is always experienced as alienated through the body of the other.

We have, then a state of tension between an Imaginary condition of de-centredness that it is conquered by the conferral of an ideal of the self-as-body, and the threat of that process as alienating. According to Lacan, the latter funds an 'original aggressivity' that, in instances of situational anxiety, may invoke images of violent corporal disassembly. These are the 'imagos of the fragmented body' and consist of those images of 'castration, mutilation, dismemberment, dislocation, evisceration, devouring, bursting open of the body' that for Lacan may be comprehensively covered by the works of Heironymous Bosch - 'an atlas of all the aggressive images which torment mankind'.[9]

This problem of individual psychology is extensively active in our cultural production. We may be forever possessed of the feelings of impulses which are characteristic of both stages, of both decentredness and mastery; either may be drawn upon as a potential source of fantasy. The reassuring framework offered by the horror film's frequently clichéd plots and settings may provide the stabilizing context for the revisitation of the more archaic and chaotic of those feelings.

If the post-modern individual is fragmented and decentred by late capitalism, as Jameson has claimed, then we should expect the horrific aspects of popular culture to display the dismembered self as a central image, as we have shown. Rosemary Jackson has already made some convincing applications of this notion to the fantasy tradition in literature, claiming that the desire for the Imaginary state offers a valid site of struggle against the repressive social formations of the Symbolic. She argues that,

> 'Fantastic texts which try to negate or dissolve dominant signifying practices, especially "character" representation, become, from this perspective, radically disturbing. Their partial and dismembered selves break a "realistic" signifying practice which represents the ego as an indivisible unit...Dualism and dismemberment are symptoms of this desire for the Imaginary'.

and goes on to quote Allon White's succinct summary of the Lacanian thesis where

> 'Corporal disintegration is the reverse of the constitution of the body during the mirror phase, and it occurs at times

when the unified and transcendent ego is threatened with dissolution'.[10]

The development of the horror film into a genre of physical destruction can be seen as a response that charts a movement from one such interrogation of character - via dual selves, where the subject was uneasy about its unity but confirmed in it by a world which interpellated it as such - to one in which boundaries and systems of address, social positions and technological advances, so challenge the subject as to prompt fantasies of corporal dissembly.

If we were to formulate this in general terms for the cinema, then it might be as the obverse of the work undertaken by Richard Dyer, who has shown the cinama's capacity to establish ideal selves in the figure of the Star. The Star is the high point of our Imaginary relation to the screen, where our identification is orchestrated by the ideally handsome, typical or superior, co-ordinated, capable and, through the posterity and repetition of the film itself, ultimately immortal. The ideal relation to the world is constructed around this kind of figure whose body is typically well-formed.

In contrast, the horror film has, with the exception of Gothic highpoints, such as the Universal and Hammer cycles, in which the Manichean inclinations towards super-natural or metaphysical explanations allowed for monsters being much on the same footing in terms of Stardom as the heroes (more so in the case of Karloff and Lugosi), always failed to produce stars of a major calibre. It is essentially a paranoid genre in which the self is perceived in its

potential for lost control, and restored order is, like the happy ending of a Sirk melodrama, a convention usually outweighed by the memory of the film's processes of disturbance. The assumed immortality of the star is a conventional opposite of the need to experience such feelings of chaos and lost self-possession. Our shock at the disappearance of Janet Leigh in Psycho in the first reel, is profound, not least for this reason, and is a rare moment in the cinema. The only enduring stars of the present phase of the genre are the child-murderer Freddy Krueger (Robert Englind) who now has his own TV series, Freddie's Nightmares (Lorimar telepictures:1988) and Jason, the adolescent-slasher of the Friday the Thirteenth cycle (outfits of Freddie's costume are now on sale along with imitation slashing claws). It is difficult to know exactly how to characterize the significance of this but it may be, like RoboCop's appropriation of threatening technology, be the psychological equivalent of 'if you can't beat them, join them'. That is to say, by becoming death we attempt to defeat our anxieties of it.

In the words of Ernst Becker, 'the body is an object in the field of the self. It is one of the things we inhabit'.[11] In constructing this thesis I have dwelt upon the more general implications of physical destruction within the contexts of a socio-psychological approach to genre. There remain unanswered questions posed by the rest of the field of the self, notably as it is constructed within the terms of particular class and sexual discourses in our culture. An investigation of either of these is beyond the scope of this work, but some brief pointers and observations can be noted on reflection.

Class

Some aspects of the present series of films involving psychopathic killers, slashers and torturers are available for readings that admit discourses based around social class. These are the narratives where the American middle-classes are terrorized either as a family - as in The Hills Have Eyes and Last House on the Left, or as groups of high-school kids, either at school and home, as in Halloween and Carrie, or out in the backwoods or at Summer Camp, as in The Texas Chainsaw Massacre and The Burning or Friday the Thirteenth. In all these films the threat is of a proletarian kind. The threat to bourgeois norms in Frankenstein has been pointed out by Robin Wood as one in which a proletarian monster threatens the aristocratic family (already surrounded by peasants in their isolated castle),[12] and the triumphant figure of Freddy Krueger is that of a shabbily dressed janitor who wears a battered felt hat.

It is possible, but needs more substantial analysis to prove, that the attack on the body in these texts is one that draws some power from the class opposition. If the body is more substantially seen as an image of control in well-ordered social formations, then the narratives which focus on schools and summer camps are very much contexts in which those rules are disrupted. Both Cropsy, of The Burning and Carrie, are humiliated and alienated by those systems (the former is mutilated), and their eventual destruction of them is a revenge upon the class that excludes them. Certainly, the young victims of these films all seem to be of the same indistinguishably well-dressed and healthy kind, where the body functions as an indication of the leisure principle. But it is difficult to produce straightforward readings

which cohere around this approach since most of these films are also constructing their ideas of social class within the most simplistic formulations of sexual anxiety, in which an interest in adolescent sex away from the parental influence is rewarded by castration (I would not include the films of Hooper and Craven in this category).

Sexuality

I have tried to raise issues within the contemporary horrific that depart considerably at times from the conception of sexuality that the horror film has usually been identified with. Whereas the other, the monster has often, in the past, been the source of monstrous representations of sexuality outside of our cultural norms, the analyses I have offered are frequently unable to accommodate such a view. In Coma the construction of the female subject is compromised by discourses concerning the body that are not subsumable by the unqualified assumption that the body simply signifies woman; in The Thing the presence of women does not arise, apart from the questions raised by their total absence; in The Fly a symbolic and literal castration of the hero is accepted. In particular, it is the breakdown of the subject/object distinction upon which the other is predicated, that problematizes our earlier categories of sexuality and their working out in the genre's narratives. It remains a difficult task to place the operations of sexuality in some of these texts, and to predict where they might indicate a future for feminist interpretations of the genre.

One possible area is that suggested by the cultural discourses which construct male and female sexuality within opposing terms of hard

and soft, boundaried and boundaryless. Writers such as Nancy Chodorow have developed this notion, and an application to film studies can be seen in Richard Dyer's analysis of Marilyn Monroe.[13] Recently, this has been applied to the horror film by Barbara Creed's use of Julia Kristeva's formulation of the 'abject', in which the monstrous feminine is related to the abject's status as the abominable representation of the maternal function. If the abject is characterized by formlessness and is 'that which does not "respect borders, positions, rules,"...that which "disturbs identity, system, order"',[14] then Creed finds that, in the bodily wastes of the horror film are related to the ways that it 'stages and restages a constant repudiation of the maternal figure'.

Certainly, I have indicated the presence of the opposite of this process in RoboCop, in which the male body is reconstructed via technology. The operation of this kind of self-control as a male phenomenon is suggested by Anthony Easthope as follows:

> 'Flesh and bone can pass itself off as a kind of armour. The skin surface can take part in the masculine fascination with armour from ancient breastplate and graves down to the modern American footballer, whose body subtly merges into strapping, pads and plastic plating. A hard body will ensure there are no leakages across the edges between inner and outer worlds'.[15]

The masculine is thus associated with the maintenance of boundary, and the feminine with its absence.

This seems to me, to be a useful inroad, but we must be careful not to abstract this kind of psychological reading from the broader

social base within which it occurs. The point of this work has been to emphasize the body as part of a rhetoric which affects psychological considerations, but which is not subsumed by them. The analysis of RoboCop, for instance, is just as crucial in its reliance upon the presence of technology in the film. The technological reconstruction of the hero is informed by sexual discourses but we cannot understand the existence of technology with psychoanalysis alone; it is also the product of a particular mode of capitalism. Similarly, we may begin to understand the use and development of special effects in the film as part of a fantasy of this nature, in themselves offering a promise in miniature. Finally, these ideas are also in allegiance to an image of the body as a metaphor of social containment, control and reconstruction.

This last indicates the capability of the body to change as a metaphor, or symbol. If we have seen the rise of its physical deconstruction and confusion in The Fly, this is also paralleled by its putting back together again. Writing of the bursting chest scene in Alien, Harvey Greenberg wonders, 'once the self's fragile envelope is breached, how can Humpty Dumpty ever be put right again?'[16] But the body is not an arbitrary symbol. It is our most immediately graspable, ever-present and convenient sign of our identity and existence, and will always be part of a process of constant re-interpretation as our social circumstances will ensure by their development and change. We might end with a quote from Félix Guattari, on the inescapable return to the kind of representation that the body offers us:

> 'The unconscious, however, despite its rejection of negativity and of all the dualist systems related to it, despite its

ignorance of love or hatred, or what is commanded or forbidden, is led to make its own kind of investigation of this crazy world of accepted values. It deals with the problems as best it can. It sneaks around them. It sets up the leading characters on the domestic scene, the representatives of the law, like so many grimacing puppets. But is is primarily in the direction of this world of social representations that we must obviously look for the intrinsic perversion of that system'.[17]

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1 Kim Newman, Nightmare Movies, London, Bloomsbury, 1988. This critical history specifically acknowledges a desire to reject the earlier approaches by the likes of Clarens and Butler, and makes its point by commencing the account with Night of The Living Dead as the progenitor of the gore film or modern horror film. It is questions of intention and theme that separates the film from earlier efforts like Herschell Lewis's in the 1960's which centre on extreme gore effects of a crude nature.

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4 Ted Polhemus, Body Style, Lennard, Luton, 1988, p.12.

5 Luther, H. Martin et al. (eds), Technologies of the Self : A Seminar with Michel Foucault, London, Tavistock, 1988, pp.161-162.

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7 Jacques Lacan, The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience, in Écrits, London, Tavistock, 1982, p.2.

8 Ibid., p.4.

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10 Jackson, op.cit., p.90.

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THE STUDENT OF PRAGUE (Stellan Rye:1913)
TRILBY (Maurice Tourneur:1915)
THE CABINET OF DOCTOR CALIGARI (Robert Wiene:1919)
NOSFERATU (F.W. Murnau:1922)
METROPOLIS (Fritz Lang:1926)
UN CHIEN ANDALOU (Luis Buñuel:1928)
DRACULA (Tod Browning:1931)
FRANKENSTEIN (James Whale:1931)
DR JEKYLL AND MR HYDE (Rouben Mamoulian:1932)
VAMPYR (Carl Dreyer:1932)
WHITE ZOMBIE (Victor Halperin:1932)
KING KONG (Ernest Schoedsack:1933)
STAGECOACH (John Ford:1933)
BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN (James Whale:1935)
DER EWIGE JUDE (Fritz Hippler:1940)
KNUTE ROCKNE : ALL AMERICAN (Lloyd Bacon:1940)
I WALKED WITH A ZOMBIE (Jacques Tourneur:1943)
A GUY NAMED JOE (Victor Fleming:1944)
THE THING FROM ANOTHER WORLD (Howard Hawks:1951)
IT CAME FROM OUTER SPACE (Jack Arnold:1953)
SHANE (George Stevens:1953)
THE CREATURE FROM THE BLACK LAGOON (Jack Arnold:1954)
THEM! (Gordon Douglas:1954)
NUIT ET BROUILLARD (Alain Resnais:1955)
FORBIDDEN PLANET (Fred McLeod Wilcox:1956)
INVASION OF THE BODYSNATCHERS (Don Siegel:1956)
THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING MAN (Jack Arnold:1957)
NIGHT OF THE DEMON (Jacques Tourneur:1957)
VERTIGO (Alfred Hitchcock:1958)
THE HORROR OF DRACULA (Terence Fisher:1958)
EYES WITHOUT A FACE (Georges Franju:1959)
RIO BRAVO (Howard Hawks:1959)
PSYCHO (Alfred Hitchcock : 1960)

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THE INNOCENTS (Jack Clayton:1961)
MONDO CANE (Gualtiero Jacopetti:1961)
THE MAN WHO SHOT LIBERTY VALLANCE (John Ford:1962)
BLOOD FEAST (Herschell Gordon Lewis:1963)
THE MAN WITH THE X-RAY EYES (Roger Corman:1963)
THE RAVEN (Roger Corman:1963)
THE FLESH EATERS (Jack Curtis:1964)
TARGETS (Peter Bogdanovitch:1967)
NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD (George A. Romero:1968)
BLOODTHIRSTY BUTCHERS (Andy Milligan:1969)
HORROR AND SEX (Rene Cardona:1969)
THE WILD BUNCH (Sam Peckinpah:1969)
M.A.S.H. (Robert Altman:1970)
THE HOSPITAL (Arthur Hiller:1971)
I EAT YOUR SKIN (Del Tenney:1971)
THE EXORCIST (William Friedkin:1973)
THE NATIONAL HEALTH (Jack Gold:1973)
THE TERMINAL MAN (Mike Hodges:1973)
ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST (Milos Forman:1975)
SHIVERS (David Cronenberg:1975)
JAWS (Stephen Spielberg:1975)
THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE (Tobe Hooper:1975)
MARATHON MAN (John Schlesinger:1976)
CARRIE (Brian DePalma:1976)
TAXI DRIVER (Martin Scorcese:1976)
CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE THIRD KIND (Stephen Spielberg:1977)
RABID (David Cronenberg:1977)
STAR WARS (George Lucas:1977)
THE MANITOU (William Girdler:1977)
THE HILLS HAVE EYES (Wes Craven:1977)
COMA (Michael Crichton:1978)
DAMIEN : OMEN II (Don Taylor:1978)
THE FURY (Brian DePalma)
HALLOWEEN (John Carpenter:1978)

Filmography (cont.)

I SPIT ON YOUR GRAVE (Meir Zarchi:1978)
ALIEN (Ridley Scott:1979)
THE BROOD (David Cronenberg:1979)
DRILLER KILLER (Abel Ferrara:1979)
FAST COMPANY (David Cronenberg:1979)
ZOMBIES : DAWN OF THE DEAD (George A. Romero:1979)
SS EXPERIMENT CAMP (Sergio Garrone:198- exact date of release not obtainable
THE EXTERMINATOR (James Glickenhaus:1980)
FAME (Alan Parker:1980)
FRIDAY THE THIRTEENTH (Sean Cunningham:1980)
SCANNERS (David Cronenberg:1980)
THE BURNING (Tony Maylam:1980)
THE SHINING (Stanley Kubrick:1980)
AN AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN LONDON (John Landis:1981)
FACES OF DEATH (Conan le Ciliare:1981)
HELL NIGHT (Tom de Simone:1981)
THE HOWLING (Joe Dante:1981)
VISITING HOURS (Jean-Claude Lord:1981)
BLADERUNNER (Ridley Scott:1982)
BRITANNIA HOSPITAL (Lindsay Anderson:1982)
CREEPSHOW (George A. Romero:1982)
FIRST BLOOD (Ted Kotcheff:1982)
PINK FLOYD : THE WALL (Alan Parker:1982)
E.T. (Stephen Spielberg:1982)
POLTERGEIST (Tobe Hooper:1982)
THE THING (John Carpenter:1982)
VIDEODROME (David Cronenberg:1982)
THE DEAD ZONE (David Cronenberg:1983)
FLASHDANCE (Adrian Lyne:1983)
THRILLER (John Landis:1983)
BLIND DATE (Nico Pastorakis:1984)
THE FALLING a.k.a. MUTANT II (Deran Serafian:1984)
FORBIDDEN WORLD (Allan Holzman:1984)
THE MAKING OF MICHAEL JACKSON'S THRILLER (John Landis:1984)

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A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET (Wes Craven:1984)
TERMINAL CHOICE (Sheldon Larry:1984)
THE TERMINATOR (James Cameron:1984)
AFTER HOURS (Martin Scorcese:1985)
HUMANOID DEFENDER (Ron Satlof:1985)
LIFEFORCE (Tobe Hooper:1985)
PALE RIDER (Clint Eastwood:1985)
ALIENS (James Cameron:1986)
COBRA (George P. Cosmatos:1986)
DAY OF THE DEAD (George A. Romero:1986)
ELIMINATORS (Peter Manoogian:1986)
THE FLY (David Cronenberg:1986)
INVASION USA (Chuck Norris:1986)
MUTANT HUNT (Tim Kincaid:1986)
9½ WEEKS (Adrian Lyne:1986)
THE REANIMATOR (Stuart Gordon)
RETALIATOR (Allan Holzman:1986)
THE VINDICATOR (Jean-Claude Lord:1986)
RAMBO : FIRST BLOOD II (George P. Cosmatos:1986)
THE WRAITH (Mike Marvin:1986)
EVIL DEAD II (Sam Raimi:1987)
FULL METAL JACKET (Stanley Kubrick:1987)
FATAL ATTRACTION (Adrian Lyne:1987)
HELLRAISER (Clive Barker:1987)
ROBOCOP (Paul Verhoeven:1987)
SWEET AS YOU ARE (Angela Pope:1988, BBC TV)
RAMBO III (Peter MacDonald:1988)
DEAD RINGERS (David Cronenberg:1988)

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NOTE ON GUIDELINES FOR PRESENTATION

The thesis conforms in lay-out and typing conventions to the University of Warwick requirements, SJA/DLGhdreq, last revised August 1988.

Conventions for Bibliographical section are standard, following Author Classification with TITLE, Place of publication, Publisher's name, Year of publication, and then other details.

In the text, any film referred to, uses the standard convention of TITLE followed by (in brackets), the name of the director and the year of release. This is discontinued after initial citation, although underlining of titles remains.